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THIRTEEN
SERMONS
Preached before the
UNIVERSITY
OF
OXFORD.

By JOHN BILSTONE, M.A. *K*
Chaplain of ALL-SOUL'S College, and Vicar
of HANNINGTON, WILTS.



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OXFORD

University in the County

By JOHN BIRCH, M.A.

Chaplain of All-
Saints



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DEDICATION.



To

RAUFE FREKE

Hannington in the County
of Wilts. Esq.

SIR, The publick Parts of
DEDICATIONS are generally
false Panegyricks found-
ed on Falshood and gilded with
Flattery. Your natural Aversion
to such Vices is but the Counter-
part of my own Sentiments, and
indulges me with an Opportunity
of declining them with a secret
Pleasure,

DEDICATION.

Pleasure, I am confident, to us both. Publick Commendation, though a Debt to Merit, is not always agreeable to a Man of Sense; and false Applause is insipid Food, and grateful to the Appetite of none but a Fool. My studied Silence in this Particular has not less *Selfishness* in it than Friendship. I would not offer the least Violence to your Modesty, nor expose myself by a vain Attempt of what I am unequal to.

The publick Parts of your Character cannot be concealed. Your known Affection to Your King; Your honest Attachment to your Country; Your professed Abhorrence of pawning Principle for Profit, and in social Life, Your admired Benevolence and unlimited Hospitality are but the faint

DEDICATION.

faint Outlines of a Character truly defireable, which require a more able Pencil than mine to colour. My View is not to extol Your real Merit, but, by an ingenuous Acknowledgment of past Favours, to merit, in some Degree, Your future Friendship. As *Gratitude* with me is a cardinal Virtue, no greater Reward can attend it than your friendly Acceptance of this small Tribute, from

Your most obliged,

Humble Servant,

JOHN BILSTONE.

DEDICATION

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more able Pen, than mine to
...Your real Merit, but by an ac-
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READER.

DISCOURSES, tending to the Reformation of Manners, have not always had the greatest Share of Mens Favour, and too often have met with no small Contempt. The Young Libertine is apprehensive He shall make no Figure in Company till he can rally Religion, ridicule it's Teachers and laugh at the Terrors of a future Judgment. The Morose and Cholerick despise Discourses of this Nature upon another Principle, and commend or condemn them only as they approve of or dislike the Author. Should the Composition claim Approbation, Envy commences a Prosecution against the Man; his moral Character is sifted and abused, meerly to patronize a severe Censure; and because He cannot be condemned as an Author, a false Surmise is suborned to condemn him.

We should find fewer Censurers, were none to play the Critick but such as could mend what They condemn. The Ignorant, who are most satyirical, would be put to the Blush, and the Knowing, who are acquainted with the Difficulty

vi To the READER.

Difficulty of Composition, would connive at some Forbids and not hastily pass Sentence for some few Oversight: E H T O T

What Fate the following Discourses may meet with gives me very little Uneasiness. My Design was good, let the Success of them be what it will. If They shall in any Degree contribute to the Regulation of human Conduct, to the Preservation of Religion and to the setting forward the Salvation of Men, My Intention is answered—I have my Reward. The Cynick may bark and the Infidel may ridicule, the Malevolence of the One will call for my Contempt, the Folly of the Other will provoke me to no Passion but that of Pity. "The Disputer of this World may expose his Propensity (if he pleases) to Contention. My View is to cultivate Divine Truth, His may terminate in seeking Conquest: A criminal Eagerness may hurry Him into Abuse; a decent Gentleness will be a greater Mark of Discretion: Whilst He is disputing for vain Glory, I shall be studious of Applause from Quietness."

P. S. The Benevolence of my Subscribers claims my Gratitude, and that it cannot be a voluntary Offering is my only Grievance. Their Connivance at my Mistakes will be a Continuance of their Favours, and of Course will perpetuate my Obligations to them.



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shall*

(1)

GOD's Forbearance with Sinners
no Argument against his Providence.

S E R M O N I.

ISAIAH xxvi. part of the 10th Verse.

*Let Favour be shewed to the Wicked, yet will
He not learn Righteousness.*

SCRUPLES concerning Providence for the most part have taken their Rise from the great Uncertainty of those Events, which generally attend human Actions. Quite different Tenets were espous'd on this Point by those who were directed by meer Nature's Light, and many gross Errors they fatally run into, by endeavouring to reconcile it to their respective Principles.

THE Disciples of *Aristotle*, who agreed with their Master in his whimsical Notion of an eternally self-existing World, were forc'd, from Contemplations on the
A Perfection

Perfection of the Deity, to acknowledge his *Providence*, tho' they denied him to have had any Hand in the Act of *Creation*. From the Opinion they had of his glorious Attributes, they could not reconcile the Difficulty of an inactive Repose with the unblemish'd Excellencies of his Nature, and therefore, being satisfy'd that Confusion must be the Consequence of such a Disposition, they concluded very justly, that (consistent with Himself) He could not sit down as a meer idle Spectator, when there was a Capacity of beautifying it with Regularity and Order.

THE Epicurean and Stoick, whether blinded by Ignorance, or contriving to subvert Religion by insinuating Atheistical Principles, reduced the divine Perfections to the Level of human Weakness. They suggested that the Hurry and almost endless Variety of Things in this Life was incompatible with that Ease, which infinite Happiness seem'd to imply; that God's eternal Quiet would be interrupted by it, and that a Condescension to regard the trifling Affairs of Men, so much beneath and unworthy his Notice, would give Mankind no great Reason to pay any Veneration to his infinite Greatness: In short, that it would derogate from that consummate Perfection which the Nature

Sermon the First.

3

Nature of God carried with it, to be so
idly employ'd, when he might be enter-
taining himself with the most luxurious and
exquisite Enjoyments.

WHETHER the Product of a growing Am-
bition, or (I know not) what other Species
of Vanity and Conceit, others have not scrup-
pled to ascribe the Success of their Actions
to the sole Merit of their own Wisdom; and,
thro' a Delusion arising from a little Prosper-
ity, have laid aside the Notion of a Super-
intending Care, and have flattered themselves
that they were Masters of all Contingencies
whatever.

BUT one unlucky Disappointment is e-
nough to extinguish the Flame of such ridi-
culous Ostentation; one ill-natured Accident
stops the Stream of their Success, and then
(with *Matchiavel*) they exclaim against the
extream Malignity of Fortune, and their
pompous Wisdom proves nothing but a la-
boured Piece of Folly.

'TIS surprizing that human Reason should
carry Men such Lengths in tracing the Pro-
ceedings of Divine Wisdom. Even meer Na-
ture itself has been made a distinct Principle
from Providence, and those Results of it,
which we in general term Judgments, (con-

4 *Sermon the First.*

sistent with this Notion) must be both Natural and Periodical ! They must (I mean) flow from a Series of Natural Causes link'd together, by which Means the World must be left to itself, and the Author of Nature be utterly excluded from every Part of its Administration. A Tenet This ! not more wicked than absurd ; extraordinary Effects being entirely ascribed to the ordinary Operations of meer Nature.

ALMOST agreeable to this are the Principles of those Men who seclude Him from all Share in the Administration of Earthly Concerns, but are so kind as to allow him the Dominion of Heaven. *Clouds and Darkness* (they say) *are round about Him*, and therefore all sublunary Things are far below out of his Sight. Thus confining the Prospect of that Eye to a limited Horizon, which at one View comprehends *all Things that are in Heaven above, in the Earth beneath, or in the Waters under the Earth.*

NOTHING (in a Word) has been omitted which has but the least Feature of an Argument ; the most amiable Attribute of God has been marshalled against his Providence, and even our modern Pretenders to Reason, have ungratefully derided his Sovereignty, and can't be prevailed with to acknowledge
or

Sermon the First

or adore him, tho' he gives such astonishing Proofs of his Lenity and Goodness.

LET Favour be shewed to the Wicked, yet will He not learn Righteousness.

INFINITE Knowledge is an essential to Providence, and infinite Holiness an Attribute of the Deity: It may not be improper therefore, in the Vindication of a superintending Care, if I make it appear,

First, THAT the Knowledge of God extends itself to every the most secret Action of Men, and that every immoral One comes under his Displeasure.

Secondly, THAT respiting the Execution of Punishment, or shewing Favour to the Wicked, instead of inviting to Virtue, too often is made a Motive to Vice: And

Lastly, THAT the Divine Forbearance, instead of destroying Providence, should be an Argument with Men, of the Certainty and Reality of it.

EXCLUSIVE of Knowledge in the highest Degree, all the other Excellencies of God would be Useless and Insignificant; and would rather

rather threaten the World with Destruction than Security. Truth, Mercy and Justice are all directed by this unerring Guide ; Wisdom and Providence are empty Names without it, and infinite Power, abstracted from infinite Knowledge, would soon turn all Things into their Original Confusion,

THE Moral Distinction betwixt Good and Evil must drop with the Notion of an unknowing God ; Licentiousness might range without Controul, and that long attempted Scheme, of obliterating all Malignity from the Nature of Sin, would be universally espous'd as a wholesome Doctrine. The Practice of Religion would be nothing but an elaborate Piece of Superstition ; Petitions to one ignorant of our Requests would be ridiculous, and to say that there is a God void of Knowledge, would prove a Man to have as little as the Fool (in the Book of Psalms) who said in his Heart there was none,

THESE are Deductions from natural Reason, which point out the Inconveniences arising from the Denial of this vital Attribute. Such fancy'd Ignorance in the Deity would raise the Merit of blind Chance, and we must pay our Tribute of Praise to meer Fortune

Sermon the First.

Fortune for every Good we at any Time
met with in Life.

UNDER such an Administration we might,
with *Baal's* Priests, cry aloud to no Pur-
pose. Ignorance in God would be as bad
as the Idol's Sleep, and put him under an
Incapacity of answering our Requests. So
morally inseparable is the Union of all his
Perfections, that the Removal of any One
unlinks the Chain, and causes the rest to
drop at once.

THE Heathen gave sufficient Evidence
of This, when He acknowledged the Ne-
cessity of worshipping the Gods with an un-
spotted Mind, from an Apprehension which
he had that the Breasts of Men were always
naked to the Eye of the Deity. Nothing
(says *Seneca*) is hid from his Knowledge;
he is acquainted with our very Thoughts,
and intimate with our Souls. A strong Sug-
gestion This! that the Principle of God's
Omniscience is deeply graven on human
Minds, and that Reason itself naturally leads
us to the Belief of it.

HIS Nature and his Attributes are inca-
pable of Separation; and Those Powers,
which We term *Understanding* and *Will*, are
nothing but one and the same uncompounded
Essence.

Essence, exerting Themselves in such kind of Acts as proceed from those secret Faculties within us.

THE Person therefore, who imagines that the freest of all human Thoughts, or the most casual future Event lye hid from His all-seeing Eye, acts the Socinian's Part, limits the Extent of his Wisdom, and makes him in *Essence* as well as in *Attribute* finite and imperfect like meer *Man*.

WHILST there is not a Word in our Tongue, but He is privy and acquainted with it: The very Motives to those Actions, which to us appear fortuitous, are all laid open to his View, and the whole Chain of Circumstances, which *We* see only in a shattered Condition, to *Him* appear as manifest, as if they came agreeable to the steady and regular Course of Nature. Every Scruple and Deliberation, Wavering and Resolution, with the most pure and absolute Motions of our Souls, are known by *Him*, without laying the least Restraint on his Liberty, or setting Bounds to his Enjoyment.

FROM these Considerations it cannot be thought too great a Presumption, (from the Attribute of Omniscience) to infer that the Almighty is perfectly Good; the Term Perfection

Sermon the First.

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fection, when apply'd to the Deity, supposing his whole Nature to be strictly so.

IN order to wipe off the Baseness of their Actions; the contentions Philosophers in the Heathen Schools employed their Sophistry against the Divine Goodness. They asserted that all human Actions were pre-ordained by the irresistible Power of an Eternal Decree: That Man could not be obnoxious for what he did by a necessary Constraint, and that all the moral Turpitude seen in his Actions was to be imputed to Him, who was the Author of the Obligation. Sin (they contended) could be no voluntary Act, and therefore they impeached *Nature* to excuse *Themselves*.

BUT these Tenets were attended with so much Inconvenience and Difficulty, that they judg'd it more prudent to leave them retracted, than to persist any further in their Defence: And their Successors, the *Stoicks* of a more modern Date, rejected their Ancestors Errors, and laid it as the Foundation of all their Morality, that Mens internal Actions were naturally free.—So evident was this Doctrine, of pre-ordained Eternal Decrees, levell'd at the unspotted Holiness of God, that it directly tended to make

B

Him

Him the Author of Sin, whose Eyes are too chaste to behold Iniquity.

HIS Purity is free from all manner of Corruption; and, if considered in Opposition to every Thing inconsistent with the compleat Simplicity of his Being, an utter Aversion to Sin will be discovered in Him; and that he should take any Complacency in it, will be irreconcilable with the unblemished Excellencies of his Nature. He is not a God that has *any Pleasure in Wickedness, neither shall any Evil dwell with Him*: Infinite Holiness being altogether as essential to Him as infinite Knowledge.

BUT so little Influence have these Perfections of God upon the Lives of Men, that notwithstanding the daily Instances of Divine Protection and Mercy, in trying by Love to lead them to Repentance, these Blessings are retorted on God as Infirmities, and respiting the Execution of Punishment, or shewing Favour to the Wicked, instead of inviting to Virtue, too often is made a Motive to Vice; which was the

Second THING I proposed to consider.

HUMAN Understanding never felt a more fatal Shock than when Man by Disobedience

Sermon the First.

II

ence fell from his Innocency. Natural Reason indeed was not totally extinguished, but its Light became so glimmering, that it now can only assist us in discovering some common and self-evident Principles of Religion and Morality. The Sensitive Appetites have got a very great Ascendancy over it, which frequently occasions absurd Falshoods to be drawn from the best established Truths: And where Interest must be gratify'd, and every Thing condemned which opposes our Passions, it will be nothing surprizing if our Notions of Good and Evil should be greatly corrupted, when the Balance is so unjust in which their Worth is to be weigh'd.

Our Inclinations for the most Part sway our Judgment, and our Belief, being too much subservient to both, is easily carried down with the Stream of our Desires. Thus, if they favour but our Wishes, we are pleas'd with Inferences which have not the Shadow of Truth, and we conclude that there is no God to punish our Sins, or else that we are Creatures unworthy his Notice, because we do not smart under the immediate Effects of Divine Vengeance.

ERROR indeed and Falshood are Things to which Nature bears a great Aversion;

Good in general is what we always desire, tho' for want of Care we suffer Judgment oftentimes to be perverted, and embrace Misery under the Disguise of Happiness. Thus by committing an Error we are in Danger of committing a Sin, and to be deceiv'd in our *Thoughts*, almost naturally leads us to be vicious in our *Actions*.

A REPRIEVE from the Grave makes us think little of offended Justice; the Apprehensions of a future Account are discarded as idle; and, from the Experience of some Acts of Mercy, we foolishly hope for a perpetual Impunity. Freedom of Thought often carries us into Licentiousness of Speech; a slow Progress may end in sure Destruction, the Nature of Sin being so insatuating, as seldom to leave the Offender in any Condition but Obduracy.

EXTREMITY in Wickedness is a Work of Time: A Man must go thro' many Scenes of Labour and Fatigue, and expect many Crosses and Disappointments, before he can satisfy the World that he is an accomplish'd Offender: He must use Violence to his Reason and Complexion too, when he offers to break thro' those Bars, which Nature (however corrupted) has left upon Virtue. 'Twill be difficult to conquer that
Shame

Shame which must attend immoral Actions, and the Task will be encreased to suppress that Fear, which a guilty Conscience cannot avoid.

AND yet Instances have never been wanting of Men who have thus mis-apply'd the Lenity of God, and made Advances in Impiety, notwithstanding the Difficulties they have met with in their Progress.

THE Space of an hundred Years before the Flood was not sufficient (under Mercy) to lead Men to Repentance: Repeated Instances of Kindness prov'd but so many Motives to Luxury; Judgments prolonged could not win them over, and therefore in the midst of their Eating and Drinking, they smarted for their Ingratitude, and were swept away by the general Inundation. *David* was no sooner anointed King over *Israel*, and delivered out of the merciless Hands of *Saul*, but we find him severely reproached by the Prophet, that he had despised the Commandment of the Lord, and done Evil in his Sight.

BUT I need not go so far for Instances to shew that Forbearance has been abus'd; when the *Arrian*, the *Deist*, the *Socinian* and *Infidel* are not ashamed to appear openly.

A PUB-

A PUBLICK Profession in some Men of this Stamp would indeed be inconsistent with their publick Situation and Character. It would be the Summit of Folly in *Demetrius* and the *Craftsmen* openly to decry *Diana's* Shrines; and, to endeavour the Subversion of her Magnificence in a secret Manner, would be plotting their own Destruction, and losing *That* by which they had their Gain.

BUT earthly Preferment may have a greater Influence on the modern Unbeliever than the distant Prospect of eternal Joys; and if raising Scruples about Religion should hit the Taste of Men in Power, and appear to be a Principle meritorious of Promotion, the Surprise ceases why some *fall off in the Time of such Temptation*, and why even the outward Professors of Christianity, should court the Suspicion of secretly undermining it. No Wonder if the Lay Infidel should be outrageous against Religion, if he should ever have Reason to think that They, who were nourished by its Bread, were privately undermining and labouring it's Subversion.

AND yet this prevaricating with Heaven has been too much practised: *They* who have eat at Christ's Table, have laid in Wait
for

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for him; and Those, who should have been his own familiar Friends, under his own Banner, have secretly assisted the Arms of his Enemies.

AND because These live and are mighty; because They prosper in the World, and under such Impiety, have Riches in Possession, the young Libertine becomes zealous under the Influence of such exalted Patterns, and (with the Atheist in the Poet) he concludes that there is no Punishment for the Wicked, because he himself is still alive. Thus the Divine Mercy is made an Argument against his Providence, and the Sinner grows insolent in his Offences, because he is not utterly deprived at once of all Possibility of Repentance.

BUT that the Forbearance of God instead of destroying Providence should be an Argument with Men of its Certainty, was the

Last THING propos'd to be considered.

RESPECTING the Stroke of offended Justice can arise from nothing but God's own free and undeserved Compassion. His Power to punish, I think, was scarce ever scrupled; and the Certainty of having put

it

it sometimes *immediately* in Execution; may serve to supersede the Offender's Hopes of Impunity; and be discovered in several Instances standing upon Record.

THE great and surprizing Deliverances which the People experienced under King *Solomon's* Administration, and the miserable Calamities which their neighbouring Nations at that Time underwent, point out to us the *immediate* Execution of Divine Judgment upon the crying Sins of those Kingdoms. Their whole History (in short) is but one continued Narrative of God's present Punishment for bad Actions, even from the complicated Miseries brought upon *Egypt* unto the Establishment of *David's* Throne. But we need not recur for Quotations either from Sacred or Prophane History to illustrate a Thing of this Nature, National Crimes having often reduced very extensive Empires to the Subjection of a People remarkable for Piety.

EVERY Sin we commit is a Violence offered to the infinite Justice of God, and calls aloud for infinite Punishment. But so peculiar to Himself is the Attribute of Mercy, that, tho' the Offender stands condemned by the Sentence of the Law, yet as
a dis-

Sermon the First.

27

a distinguishing Mark of Divine Providence, the Execution is defer'd, and an Opportunity of Reformation given the Sinner by the Almighty.

ADVANCES in Wickedness, when founded on Acts of Mercy, bespeak Ingratitude of the most offensive Nature. The Bounty of God declares Him a Being of perfect Goodness; our constant Preservation displays His Attributes; and, if we cannot discover This in every Day of Life, we prostitute Reason to a pitiful Use, and make Ourselves unworthy the Beneficence which we receive from him. — *He that is Wise will observe these Things, and He shall understand, or have a proper Notion of, the loving Kindness of the Lord.*

Should God then be extream to mark out every One for present Punishment whom he found at any Time doing amiss, the whole World might unanimously join in that Expostulation of David, *Who then O Lord might abide it?* — Was he to send abroad his destroying Angels, charg'd with the Execution of his immediate Vengeance upon every Sin of Man, who would be able to stand under so terrible a Visitation, or what would the whole World be

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but

but one extended Field of Blood?—Divine Justice would indeed be terribly display'd; but what would become of Divine Mercy?

OUR Faith, and our Obedience, resulting from it, are given Us as Rules to conduct us to Happiness; But of what Service would These be to Us, if the Divine Judgments were always made the Objects of our Senses? It would take off all Restraints from the Consciences of Men; rob Virtue of all its engaging Charms, and make a servile Fear the reigning Principle of all Mens Actions.

BUT there is Mercy with God, who desires not the Destruction of a Sinner, who consults the general Good of Mankind, and by his Forbearance would willingly lead Men to Repentance, therefore may his deferring Sentence be esteem'd a Blessing, and his Providence be admired and adored by all Men.

Quicquid magnam Utilitatem Generi adferret Humano, (as we find it in Tully) id non sine Divinâ Bonitate erga Homines fieri arbitrabantur. And very properly did the Antients judge of, and argue for a Providence,

dence, from that particular essential Attribute his Goodness. Power (in short) without Mercy would fill the Mind with perpetual Horror, whilst a Heavenly Forbearance should win us into Goodness, and be a prevalent Motive to the most affectionate Veneration.—That we are preserved in such Danger is the Lord's Doing, and it ought to be marvellous in our Eyes.

FROM what has been said on each Particular a short Application may not be improper, in order to influence human Practice.

Is the Knowledge of God then of an universal Nature, and are all Things naked and displayed before him, Secret Offences from hence receive a Wound, which nothing but Insensibility can make supportable. To do what will render us obnoxious to his Displeasure, is raising an Opposition to our own real Interest; and to make Solitude and Obscurity a Refuge from Omniscience, is to play the Fool in Thought as well as Practice.

To be impenitent under Mercy, and to apply that Blessing to the Nourishment of our Sins, is a Crime of such a complicated

cated Nature, as wants a Name to express its Deformity; and to argue against Providence, because we are wonderfully preserved, demonstrates our Incapacity of tracing the Footsteps of Divine Wisdom, and an unreasonable Ingratitude under the Divine Beneficence. It will be more prudent and pious to look up to the Heavens, *from whence cometh our Help*, than to impute the Success of our Actions meerly to second Causes; and by acquiescing in the wise Administration of God, we shall give an Argument of the Progress which we have made in our Christian Duty.

A REPRIEVE from Execution fills the condemn'd Malefactor with a grateful Joy; and should it terminate in a Pardon, He is at a Loss how to express his Resolutions of Amendment.—From this single Observation let us reflect upon our own Baseness; consider how ungenerous We have been in our Behaviour towards God; how We have trampled upon His Mercy; condemned (or at least despis'd) His Proceedings, and doubted whether there was *any Knowledge in the Most High*, because He gives us Opportunities of returning from our Folly; How We have made That a Motive to a sinful Presumption, which was designed

Sermon the First. 21

designed as a Preservative against continual Despair; and instead of avoiding, by Repentance, the impending Blow, We have been solicitous in calling it down upon us.

In a Word: Let us remember that it is foolish to hope for Security in our Offences under Omniscience; but to abuse God's Mercy and Forbearance is ungrateful and impious.



designed as a Preservative against continual
Belian, and instead of avoiding, by Re-
sistance, the impending Blow, (We have
been foolish in calling it down upon us.

The Upland of GOD is not as a remnant that is
is foolish to hope for security in our Of-
fence under Omnipotence; but to abate
God's Mercy and Forbearance is ungrate-
ful and impious.

Behold the Heart and History of Heaven
cannot contain the love which is the
Heart of God.

The Father David, who when his Date
should have an End, and he should be
down in the Grave and sleep with his
Ancestors, his Posterity should enjoy his
Throne and Kingdom, provided they would
lead in that State of Integrity, which
he

And now willing that that Place which
The Ubiquity of GOD vindicated.

S E R M O N II.

I. KINGS, viii. 27.

*Behold the Heaven and Heaven of Heavens
 cannot contain thee, how much less this
 House which I have built?*

THE Words are part of that Prayer
 which *Solomon* made at the Dedic-
 tion of the Temple, as he stood before the
 Altar, in the Presence of all the Congrega-
 tion of *Israel*. It was a Promise (he re-
 collected) which the Almighty had made to
 his Father *David*, that, when his Days
 should have an End, and he should lye
 down in the Grave and sleep with his
 Ancestors, his Posterity should enjoy his
 Throne and Kingdom, provided they would
 tread in those Steps of Integrity, which
 he

he had so perfectly chalk'd out for their Direction.

AND now willing that That Place; which he had happily finished, (in order to set forth the Glory of God) should be for ever supported agreeable to the Design for which it was built; He supplicates the Almighty to let that Word be verified which he spake to his Father; to grant that there might never be wanting a Man; to sit on the Throne of *Israel*; who should maintain *David's* Character; and as he had rais'd a Temple to the Honour of his Name, that he would make it the Habitation of his Divine Presence, and so continually defend and preserve it.

No sooner had he thus petitioned Heaven in the Behalf of that House, which with the most costly Ornaments, he had endeavoured to make fit for the Reception of so glorious a Being; but he looks back upon the magnificent Structure with a timorous Eye; is apprehensive that the Deity will not dwell in Tabernacles made with Hands, and therefore, upon such a Doubt, seems to expostulate in the Words before us. — But will God indeed dwell on the Earth? — Behold the Heaven and Heaven

Sermon the Second

25

of Heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this House that I have built?

FROM this short Account of the Words, I shall endeavour, as they concern the Ubiquity of God, in the

First PLACE to vindicate That Attribute from the Objections urg'd against it by Socinians and Others,—And

Secondly, I SHALL conclude with a few Observations, on the Use which may be made of it with Regard to our Lives.

THE Notions of the Heathen World, respecting the essential Attributes of God, as they proceeded from no Direction, but That of meer Nature, were generally speaking very dark and intricate. That Description indeed which One of them gave us of the Nature of the Deity (that he was a Sphere whose Centre was every where, but Circumference no where) display'd a very uncommon Stretch of Thought, and bespoke such an Apprehension of his absolute Perfection, as might have been heard with Pleasure from the Mouth of a Christian Philosopher.

D

THEY

THEY, (amongst others) who espous'd the Tenets of *Epicurus*, ran into very absurd Methods of Reasoning concerning the Divine Omnipresence. They dreamt that it would derogate from the supreme Dignity to be engag'd in the pitiful Employment of exercising a paternal Care over Things, which in their own Nature so much resembled Corruption and Refuse. They could not therefore come into the Acknowledgment of his Ubiquity, but limited his Being barely to the Heavens, and circumscribed the Providence of One, *whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain.*

VERY inadequate Conceptions these of an Infinite Subsistence! to fancy it a Trouble to him to take Care of those Creatures, the Creation of which was his Pleasure and Delight.

OTHERS, willing to soften these flat Denials of what they thought in some Degree must belong unto him, invented a Distinction between his *Essence* and *Providence*. They allowed his Care indeed to extend to every Part of the Creation, but as for his Being, *That* they confined within the Circle of Heaven, where the Epicureans had shut up both. They could not reconcile an absolute

solute Disbelief of his Fatherly Protection with the unsully'd Perfectness of his Justice, and therefore, from an awful Principle of Reverence, they own'd his Providence, tho' guilty of denying his Essential Presence.

AN Error this which they unfortunately slippt into; by apprehending they should make too free with his Greatness, if they made any Place but Heaven fit for his Residence.

IN order to establish this ill-grounded Opinion, it was judg'd necessary, by the first Espousers of *Socinianism*, to find out a plausible Distinction on those Passages of Scripture, which might be made use of to confute this favourite Error. Hence arose a *Virtual, Potential, and Effiencious Ubiquity*: Any thing indeed that could be made against that of his *Essence*; and they applied it accordingly to those Places of the Prophets which evidently declare his *Essential Presence*.

Thus when *Jeremiah* describes the Almighty speaking against those Persons who endeavoured to impose their *Bablings* on the World for *Prophecy*, we find him asserting his *Immensity* in the most open and familiar Manner; in Words which one would

Imagine could not be applied to any Meaning but That of his *Essence*.

AM I a God at Hand (says he) and not afar off? Can any bide himself in secret Places that I shall not see him? Do not I fill Heaven and Earth says the Lord? The Heaven is my Throne, and the Earth is my Footstool.

ALL which Expressions (how clear soever the *Essential Presence* may be declared in them) are asserted by *Crellius* to signify no more than a *Virtual Ubiquity*: And *Vorstius* himself, another of the same Stamp, declares, in Defiance of all Scripture, that a *Substantial Omnipresence* is a Thing impossible.

Of this Attribute the Rabbins entertained so good an Opinion, that they thought it almost improper to say that God was in every Place, and therefore they stiled him *Place itself*. They looked upon it as unworthy of him to say he was contained even in every Thing, and described him for that Reason as containing every Thing in Himself, Agreeable to which is the Account given of him by *Theophilus*; *ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ ὄντων, καὶ αὐτὸς τὰ πάντα ἐστίν.* Which the Expression of *Tertullian*, speaking of God, comes

comes very near to: *Sibi erat et Locus, et Mundus, et Omnia.*

THEY therefore who confine God in his Essence to the Heavens only, but allow his Care to be universally diffused over the whole Creation, would do well to consider that a *Presence of Power* is so far from excluding, that it rather necessarily supposes an *Essential Presence*. For as he acts immediately by his Essence, He may safely be said not to act where he is not; and so the *Virtual Ubiquity*, by the Socinian Argument, becomes as great a Fiction, as they willingly would make an *Essential* one. Nay we may just observe too, that the very Concession they make of his *Presence of Power* and *infinite Knowledge*, serves to destroy the very Argument which they endeavour to advance. The Divine Attributes being one Individual Essence; having really no separate or distinct Subsistence in the Divine Nature, but only in our Manner of conceiving, according to their different and external Operations. So that from this Inseparability of them from his Essence, we may justly conclude that wherever he is present by his Knowledge or his Power, he is not only *Virtually* but *Essentially* present.

BUT Objections against this Attribute are most

most astonishing from the Mouths of those who enjoy the Benefit of a Divine Revelation. Men! who have wrested Scripture to confirm Doctrines that are utterly inconsistent with it, and have readily engaged in the *modest Undertaking* of confuting the Almighty by his own Words,

WHEN God vouchsafed to shew his Mercy towards the open Offences of Sodom and Gomorrah, by giving Abraham an Opportunity of interceding for them, we read in the Book of Genesis, that he was resolved to go down to see whether they had done according to the Cry of it; and after he had done communing with the Patriarch, he then is said to have went his Way.

THESE Expressions have been taken so literally as to exercise the Sophistry of Men against the Immenfity of his Nature; and have put them upon resolving a *moving Ubiquity* into an Absurdity of such a Degree, as argues Weakness in that Being, whose Expressions they are, and a foolish Credulity in Those who believe them.

If this deserves the Name of an Objection, it might be greatly strengthened by the Prophet's Description of him in his Judgments against Judah: *Coming down from Teman,*

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Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran: Where we find him moving from Place to Place to the great Astonishment even of Things Inanimate. So that if Passages in Scripture are always to be interpreted by the Letter only, we must (in the fore-cited Places) conclude, that God was uncertain (till he *came* down to see) whether the Sins of those Cities were as bad as they were said to be; and from other Passages of the same Holy Writings (if we stick to this Method of Interpretation) we may justly infer that there are *seeing* Mountains and *bowing* Hills; Waters that can not only utter their *Voice*, but at his Appearance lift up their *Hands* likewise.

THIS would be the unavoidable Consequence of such Constructions put upon the Books either of the Old or New Testament: And whether Explications of this Nature would rank us amongst Expositors of any considerable Note, I shall leave to the Determination of any Man who stands possess'd of common Sense.

IN every Case then of this Kind, Words are not to be taken in the strictest Propriety of Language, but rather as kindly adapted by God to the Capacities of our Nature, in order to qualify us for the more
easy

easy Apprehension of them : And tho' they are spoke after the Manner of Men, yet we are always to consider them as agreeable to the Infinite Perfection of God.

THUS when the Almighty is represented as appearing on the Mount to the great Lawgiver *Moses*, his Presence at that particular Time does not imply any previous Absence, but only that he manifested himself in a more eminent Manner to human Conceptions ; and as for his Departure when he withdrew himself from him, it was only concealing *that* Glory before reveal'd, which required a Veil as necessary to behold it.

THE same Solution would be sufficient to reconcile Difficulties of this Sort in all other Places of Scripture, which might seem to favour such curious Enquiries, could we but prevail with Men to lay aside that Prejudice, which pins them so close to any Opinion of this Kind.

THEN, that *we shall see God as he is*, would not be urg'd as an Argument against his *Immensify* : Men would not infer so rashly, that, because our Natures in the next Life are not to find an infinite Amendment, or our Capacities be so enlarged as to be able to take in the *Whole* of the Almighty,

mighty, therefore he is not Infinite. They would rather conclude (considering the Dimness of our Knowledge here) that a more favourable Construction might be put upon the Words; and tho' (strictly speaking) we cannot be said to see him as he really is, Yet in Heaven we shall view him in so eminent a Manner, as will sufficiently justify this Expression of Scripture.

ONE Place more may be in a few Words considered, which has been made use of as an Objection against this Essential Attribute.

WHEN Job had acknowledged the Justice of God, notwithstanding the Trials he had experienced from his Hand, He no sooner declared the Folly of endeavouring to contend with Infinite Power, but from the Invisibility of his Nature proves the Madness of such an Attempt, in that He was able to smite us, without suffering us to see the approaching Danger, or making the least Defence against it.

Lo He goeth by me (says he) and I see him not: He passeth on also, but I perceive him not: Behold I go forward, but He is not there; backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left Hand, but I cannot behold

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him;

him; and He bideth himself on the Right, so that I cannot see him.

FROM which Passage, tho' intended as a Justification of the Divine Omnipresence, which the Context fully shews, the *Anti-Ubiquitarians* draw the most ridiculous and absurd Conclusions.

If he be a Substance (say They) every where present, actually filling every Part of the Creation; How does He escape the Senses of Men? Or how can He pass by us and we not see him?—A Method of Reasoning this! destructive of the Simplicity of his Nature; making him a Being compounded of Parts, as gross and filthy as *their Own*, and reducing him to the same Level with the Heathen Idol, which its Worshippers fancied to be sometimes taking a Journey.

BUT he is not as Man; of like Parts and Passions with ourselves: He is not present with his Creatures by Way of Corporeal Contact; but as his Nature supposes the most absolute and perfect Simplicity; as he is a Being purely Spiritual, and upon that Account no proper Object of our bodily Senses, He may therefore be strictly said to be *all in all*, in Defiance of all the Objections

jections which these weak Enquirers would raise against him.

Our external Faculties, are allowed on all Hands, not to be fram'd for the Perception of any Thing but their own respective Objects; No sensible One whatever being capable of moving any but its own proper Sense.—So that as God is a Being of a Spiritual Nature, we may conclude him to be the Object only of our firm and steadfast Faith; a Kind of Spiritual Sense which he has been pleased to graft in us agreeable to our Nature. In short, he is a Being so pure and invifible, that we may ask (with David) *Whither shall we go from his Spirit? Or to what Place shall we flee from his Presence?*

HENCE then it is very observable that the Inconveniencies, arising from the Denial of this Attribute, would be almost endless; And there would be as much Pains required in the *Socinian* to keep out of *Atheism*, as He had taken before to become an *Infidel*.—For *That* sure must be one of the *strange Gods*, which labours under the least Blemish or Imperfection: The Nature of a *true one* being (like the Observation of the Law) destroy'd by a Fault in any one Point of it.

SHOULD we therefore shut up his Being within the Circle of Heaven, and allow him to act here below only by his *Care*, or by *second Causes*, we should make him, in his *Essence*, finite; suppose his *Providence* to be more extensive than his *Being*, and make Infinite Power to be lodg'd and contain'd within a finite Subject.—Nay, upon this very Supposition, it would carry with it no Contradiction at all, should we say that the World itself was greater than its Maker.

How or in what Manner his *Essence* is thus universally diffused seems to be one of those Secrets which belong to Himself only. A Question! which we ought not to pretend rashly to determine, nor fit to be the Subject of human Curiosity.

THAT it does not consist in any Multiplication, we may safely aver, because it is individually *one and the same*: Neither in such an Extension as a Corporeal Substance may be drawn out into; nor in That which the Naturalists apply to Bodies. But we may rather think that, as God is an *uncreated Spirit*, it consists in such a *simple Infinity* of the *Divine Essence*, as makes him intimately and essentially every where; present with every Thing, but limited by Nothing, To

To point out the Use we should make of this incommunicable Attribute with Regard to our Lives, was what I proposed to do, by way of Conclusion.

UPON this Truth then, that *God is Essentially every where*, the Folly of Hypocrisy and the Vanity of secret Sins will appear in a very open Light.

WAS any created, finite Being capable of knowing the Secrets of Mens Minds, it would entirely put an End to all deceitful Arts, and *that* Mask would drop from the Face of the Hypocrite which now screens him from publick Infamy. This Blindness in Mankind he looks upon as almost utterly incapable of detecting his Schemes: He considers that nothing can discover him but some outward Signs, which are themselves almost as deceitful as his Heart; and therefore he has nothing to do, in order to play his Part with Security, but to act in Appearance the Counterpart of his Thoughts, and impose upon the Credulity of the World, in the only Point they possibly can judge by.

HENCE Revenge and Hatred are frequently conceal'd by an agreeable and pleasing Countenance; and a lascivious Thought is sometimes

sometimes patronized by a forced, tho' seemingly modest Blush.

EVEN in Devotion (where our Thoughts should be altogether employed about the Object of our Worship) the Hands are generally devoutly joined, whilst the Heart (it is to be feared) is contriving some vain or wicked Employment for them: And the Eyes, which seem full of the Contemplation of the Deity, can wander from their Duty and dwell upon Vanity. Nay even good Actions (in Persons of this Complexion) are not always Motives for our believing them sincere; Because Religion itself may be apply'd to an ill Use; Instances of which need not be enumerated.—We may however live abstemiously, the more ravenously to devour *Widows Houses*; and a bare Pretence has been the Design of long Prayers.

BUT the Conduct of our Actions would be sufficiently regulated, by a constant Remembrance that God is ever with us. Every Motion and Tendency to Evil would be easily check'd by so serious a Reflection; and those shocking Transgressions, which Men endeavour to screen under the Veil of Darkness, would be forsaken and repented of, as Impositions upon the World, did they but consider

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consider how they kindled God's Wrath against Themselves.

UNDER such an Apprehension our *Fear* would deter us from doing what was Evil, and Self-preservation would put us upon embracing what was Good. Applause and Commendation are what we court in our Fellow Creatures with Art and Industry; and whether the Approbation of God be not as great a Motive to an upright Behaviour, as the Praise of Men, the Rewards attending *Both* may serve to determine.

THIS Sense then of the Divine Presence is the very Spirit of Religion, and the greatest Spur to the Practice of it.—Without it our best Resolutions would be quickly staggered, and upon Supposition that *He was a God afar off, and not at Hand*, we should be apt to suspend our religious Addresses, and follow the Bent of our corrupt Desires.

ALL my Ways (says the Psalmist) *are before Thee, therefore have I kept thy Testimonies O Lord.*—A Reflection this upon the Ubiquity of God, which wrought in him perfect Obedience; engag'd him in a Serious and reverent Deportment; so that he stood in Awe, and sinned not; commun'd
with

with his own Heart, and in every Place was still as in the Presence of God.

THE same awful Apprehensions of the *Divine Immensity* would make us steadfast and immoveable in point of Duty: The Force of Evil would easily be repelled, and the Assaults of Temptation would be withstood with Pleasure. The Heroes of Christianity would be our admired Patterns, and Conscience would never be prostituted to gratify Pride, Luxury or Avarice. Our Religion would never be made the Tool to hoist us into Greatness; but, even when persecuted by a triumphant Infidelity, we should defend it before Kings and not be ashamed of it. We should rather be contented to lose *What* we are worthy of in this Life, than act a dishonest Part in order to get It; and we should think it more profitable to enter into Heaven poor or blind, than to gain our Ends, thro' indirect Means, and be appointed the Portion of the *Double-Dealer* hereafter. In a Word; We should rejoice under the Protection of God's Presence, and the Shadow of his Wings; conclude it infinitely preferable to be censured by Men as Hypocrites in obstinately *doing* our Duty, than to be punished hereafter as *such* for the *Neglect* of it.

Human ENQUIRIES reasonably
restrained.

S E R M O N III.

J O B, xi. 7, 8.

Canst thou by searching find out God?

*Canst thou find out the Almighty unto
Perfection?*

It is as high as Heaven, what canst thou do?

Deeper than Hell, what canst thou know?

MAN was at first created in the Image
of his Maker; perfectly resembling
the Deity in Uprightness, tho' not a sub-
stantial and solid Transcript. But when,
upon his Disobedience to a Law enjoin'd
him, he fell from that State of Purity and
Innocence, He then became a Stranger to
Concerns of a spiritual Nature, and involv-
ed himself in the Misery of Original Cor-
ruption.

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THIS unhappy Procedure in the first Parent of Men, was owing chiefly to a very silly and impious Curiosity; a foolish and daring Attempt to become divinely wise, occasioning the miserable Ignorance of Mankind in general.

A PARTICULAR Instance of human Weakness, in Point of Knowledge, this present Chapter has recorded in it. The Parallel indeed is not strictly adequate; because *Adam* had nothing, but a curious Enquirer, to tempt him to break thro' the single Prohibition of his God; whilst *Job* was laden with all the Worldly Misfortunes which Hell could invent, to plead in the Behalf of his Error, concerning the Superintendency and Providence of Heaven.

THE Transgression however of each, arose from a Desire of Wisdom, or at least from a Conceit of it; tho' Folly at the same Time (or what is the most eminent Degree of it, Impiety) was the genuine Product in both Cases. One proceeded from a criminal Ambition of being as knowing as God; the other's Murmurings betrayed a Conceitedness, that he had acquired That, which *Adam* wanted.

UPON

Sermon the Third.

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UPON this the Rebuke in my Text is founded. The *Naamathite's* Ears were gratified with the Provocations of *Job's* Discourse. Temporal Calamities will never derogate from the Justice of God; whilst Impatience under them will be ever blameable in Man; and Arguments, in the Defence of it, discover an opinionated Ignorance, under a meer Pretence to greater Degrees of Knowledge.

SHOULD not (says he at the 2d Verse) the Multitude of Words be answered? And should a Man full of Talk be justified? Shall thy Lies make Men hold their Peace; and when thou mockest, shall no Man make thee ashamed?—All these, and many other Particulars he readily answers, and proceeds in an artful Manner, to consider the *Divine* Perfection, in order to turn the Stream of *Human* Vanity. Those Errors which he had pretended to discover in the Dispensations of God, He assured him were Nothing but Infirmities in Himself; That the Nature of *Heaven* was too extensive for *his* Capacities, and that the *Divine* Nature, being infinitely greater, infinitely surmounted the shallow Faculties of weak Man.—Canst thou (then) by searching find out the Almighty? Canst thou find out God to Perfection?

Sermon the Third.

'Tis a Task never intended for a Creature's Enquiry: 'Tis as high as Heaven, thy Understanding cannot soar unto it; 'Tis as deep as Hell, 'twill be in vain therefore for Thee to strive to fathom or know its Depth.

THIS then being premised, the particular Doctrine contained in my Text will, I hope, be sufficiently explained by the Observations I shall make upon the following Heads, which shall comprehend the Substance of this Discourse,

First, THEN I shall observe that there seems to be a natural Propensity in the Mind of Man to Knowledge and Enquiry.

Secondly, I SHALL assign some Reasons, why God has limited and restrained this Passion.—And

Lastly, FROM Defects that are in us, both natural and moral, I shall consider our Incapacity to trace the Proceedings of God in his Divine Providence.

THE Desire of Knowledge seems to be a Principle as early as our Being, and constantly

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stantly attends us thro' every Stage. In our Infancy 'tis notorious how much we display a little sort of inquisitive Talent; in almost every Action shew a Fondness for Information, and listen with Pleasure to every kind of Amusement. Thus whilst we are *Babes and Sucklings*, incapable of subsisting, unless we hang on our Mother's Breast, we cannot but discover a Longing after Knowledge, God having ordained in us an early *Strength of Inclination* for it.

No sooner are the Impediments of Childhood conquered, but the Progress, already made, is deem'd only the Rudiments of something to be perfected. And when we are arrived to tollerable Degrees of Reason and Maturity, and become capable of forming pretty right Judgments, and of making proper Deductions; yet still our Curiosity remains unsatisfied; our Thirst is rather increased, than quench'd by our Discoveries. So fond are our Appetites of being perfectly gratified, and our Capacities so large, that no present, definite Good can long retain our Love, or pacify our Cravings. Our Enjoyments in Possession soon grow flat, and nothing but fresh Entertainments can relieve us. An aspiring Temper still lurks within; a kind of Infinite, (or at least) Indefinite Ambition, which Variety alone can in any

any Measure satisfy. Such is this restless Tendency, this Covetousness of Knowledge, daily exercising human Thoughts, that it proves a continual Spur, and quickens our Endeavours to enrich the Mind with intellectual Treasures.

THE necessary Pains indeed, to make a Man considerable, have deterred many from the actual Pursuit of it; when at the same Time the secret Desire has lain within, tho' the Difficulty has prevented its appearing in Action. The Infirmities even of Age can't stifle this Passion; the old Man himself will frequently be plodding, tho' his fruitless Labours serve only to prove him in his second Childhood.

THIS I observe for this Reason alone, to shew that a Desire of Knowledge is (as it were) planted in our Nature; a Prone-ness to which is visible in the Infant, without expiring even when a Multitude of Years hath reduced us a second Time to the same Condition.

AND after all this curious and painful Enquiry, to what Degrees of Understanding do Men generally arrive? For the most Part to Ignorance enough to make them insolent, and conceited of what their own Imaginations

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Imaginations best demonstrate to be Folly. Real Merit is commonly found in a modest Demeanure; and Men are ever right in their Judgments in condemning Pride as a meer Pretence to it.

WHAT then has a Man to boast of, upon the Point of Merit, who cannot distinguish Good from Evil? Profit and Worldly Advantage employ his Thoughts; whilst his Expectations are deservedly rewarded with Disappointment. His Proceedings are so inconsistent with the Rules of Prudence, that notwithstanding his great Propensity to Knowledge, one would imagine he had never enquired after the Road to Wisdom. His Method to raise his Fortune, too often tends to his Disadvantage and Ruin; *His Table becomes a Snare to take himself withal*, and the very Thing, intended for his Welfare, proves the too frequent Occasion of his *Falling*.

THUS seemingly unhappy is Man, in as much as Nature has given him strong Inclinations, and at the same Time denied him the Use of them; limited his Enquiries and restrained that great Passion for Knowledge, so as to leave him ignorant of what is good for him in this present World.—To offer a few Reasons for this was the

Second

Second THING I propos'd doing.

WERE we allowed an unrestrained Enquiry, and capable in this Point of judging for ourselves, such an Indulgence would be apt to create in us a Forgetfulness of that Dependance which we have on God; and all Laws, but those of our own Will, would be disregarded and despised as unlawful Restraints. Whilst in this limited Condition, kept (as it were) in a State of necessary Ignorance; We live sensible of that Dependance; and without arrogantly confiding in our own Strength, we put our Trust in the living God. — Acts of Devotion are very much promoted by this necessary Restraint; Obedience is required at our Hands, and (in Point of Interest) as we value Happiness, or dread Misery, it obliges us to send up our Petitions to Heaven. But the Good of *Man* is not the only Thing couch'd under this imaginary Disadvantage; but the Divine Glory is greatly magnified; God's Wisdom and his Power more apparently displaying themselves by this Means to us.

AND when the Almighty in a Way of Justice, is found crossing our Hope, and baulking our Expectations, by turning That into an Evil, which we apprehended to be good,

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good, He then convinces us of the Folly of our Thoughts, and shews us how much we are deluded, and misled by Appearances. So likewise on the other Hand when he discovers his Wisdom in a merciful Manner, and shews his Power in Acts of Love, when he turns *Balak's* Curse on the *Israelites* into a Blessing; and the Patriarchs intended Mischief on their Brother into an unexpected Advantage; these Things plead in the Behalf both of his Justice and Goodness; and sufficiently justify the Limits put upon human Enquiries, and his reserving the Knowledge of some Things purely to Himself. It serves likewise to instruct us that the Things of this World are not to be made the principal Objects of our Desires; that external Evils (how startling soever) are not in themselves so very terrifying, nor the most valued Goods so very engaging; seeing One may tend to the Advancement of our Interest, the Other (contrary to Expectation) end, or be instrumental in promoting our Ruin.

BESIDES; This Indulgence would still be more inconvenient: The Effect, of following the Bent of our own Counsels, would be fatal; which many Instances of Life are sufficient to convince us of. Those Prejudices, which are agreeable to our natural

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Humours

Humours and Appetites, are always entertained with a great deal of Pleasure. Desire of present Advantage easily supercedes our Reason, and steers our Course most agreeably to itself. Under the Government of such a Tyrant, we shall find it no easy Task to shake off the Yoke; We must become Masters of more Philosophy, than we were, when we first submitted, or else the greatest Slavery will be our Condition for ever. There can be but little Probability of walking in the Paths of Righteousness or in the Ways of Peace, when our Steps are ordered by a predominant Passion, and the Road chalk'd out for us by the most turbulent Powers of the Mind.

So that had God left us entirely to the Disposal of Ourselves; had he indulged us in all our criminal Desires, and allowed us an unbounded Liberty of Enquiry, we had only been given up to the absolute Direction of our own Wills; which are too well known to be incapable of, or at least unfaithful, in advising us to act prudently in the common Conduct of Life. 'Twould have been turning us out blind amidst Precipice and Danger, where we must necessarily perish, unless Fortune was capable, and *willing* likewise, to work Miracles in our Behalf. Thus sway'd by Prejudice, conquer'd by Passion, and

Sermon the Third. II

and subject to Lust, we should answer the Characters of the Wizards in the Book of Job, *meet Darknes in the Day Time, and grope at Noon Day as in the Night.*

THESE few Reasons (tho' many more might be given) may be enough to vindicate the Divine Wisdom and Goodness in laying a Restraint upon human Enquiries. It keeps us mindful of a State of Dependance; it secures us from innumerable Dangers which we should otherwise run into, and magnifies the Glory of God himself, who turns our imaginary Evils into real Advantages and substantial Blessings.

UPON the whole; instead of lessening, It magnifies the Divine Attributes; It obliges Man (as he *knows not what a Day may bring forth*) to prepare himself with Thankfulness to receive any Condition of Life, to submit himself with Humility to the Dispensations of Providence, the *Ways* of which are *unsearchable, and past finding out.*

AND this brings me to the *Third and Last THING* proposed,—To shew our Incapacity of tracing the Proceedings of God in his Divine Providence, from Defects that are in us both Natural and Moral.

MAN, tho' Innocence stamp'd a Kind of Divinity upon his Nature, and at his Creation gave him some Resemblance of the Deity, in other Respects was but a fitting, airy Appearance, just as a Dream is in Comparison of Truth, or as a Shadow with Regard to its Substance. The best of his Endowments, with all the Powers belonging to both Soul and Body, are in themselves so vain and uncertain, that it would be easy to observe, from the Imperfections of either, the vain Shadow in which he continually walks. His Make and Constitution (tho' manifestly the Work of a Divine Artificer) give us an Idea of the greatest Frailty; His Body carries with it the unavoidable Causes of a necessary and speedy Dissolution; which, tho' it may seem to promise him a long Continuance, will delude those Hopes by a daily and hasty Decay.

'Tis a Fabrick, which requires so much Care in raising; attended, in its best Condition, with such Uncertainty, and is so transient in its Duration, that some wicked Men have objected it as a Feint against the Wisdom of the Contriver, to be (as it were) so curious in finishing a Work of so perishing a Nature, expos'd by the Delicacy

licacy of its own Parts to such Inconveniences, as tend to demolish it every Moment.

I NEED not take Notice of the many Inconveniences arising from the particular Necessities of Nature, nor of that Slavery which we are subject to, of owing our Security to a Dependance upon Beings more base than ourselves; both which are Arguments of our natural Imperfection, and such as our greatest Embellishments can never answer,

OUR *Strength* (let it be considered in the most advantageous Light) is so little to be depended on, that its own Name has been thought a Compliment; and yet we are apt to value ourselves upon this *Rottenness of Bones*, and to glory in That which cannot Support us. When we are vigorous and strong, we may drop at once, and consume (in the Language of *Job*) as a *Thing that is rotten*, or as a *Garment eaten with the Moth*. So that the strong Man himself, in his natural Strength, is but very imperfect; *His Iron Sinews becoming like Straw*, and (as the Almighty loftily expresses it) *his brazen Bones turning into rotten Wood*.

As for our *Knowledge* (if that be boasted

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ed of to tollerate our Pride) what is it upon Reflection more than Conjecture? Our Imaginations can extend no farther than our Ideas, and those are limited to our Way of Perception. Nay, 'tis *flattering* Man's Knowledge to suppose it *so* extensive; tho' our Ideas are but few and very imperfect. One single Object is so full of Difficulty, that we are obliged to divide the most simple Being into several Inadequate Ideas, in order to reduce it to our narrow Conception. *We only see thro' a Glass darkly*; We are ignorant of many noble Truths; no Wonder therefore if those hidden Things, which belong to God alone, should be concealed from the Eyes of our Understanding.

IN this fluctuating, fickle Condition we are continually ebbing and flowing: Our Resolutions at best are very uncertain, and We ourselves, like the great *Agrippa* in another Case, only *almost persuaded to be* contented. This Dissatisfaction, attending human Enquiry, forced the Philosopher into a Fit of Modesty, and extorted a Confession from him, that he knew nothing at all.

HAPPY would it be if our modern Enquirers had made so good a Progress in their Christian Studies; and not venture to pronounce

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pronounce with their *Mouths*, what the Fool (in the Book of Psalms) only said in his *Heart*, *There is no God*. Happy would it be, if they would set a less Value on Reason, than to oppose it to Revelation; and not refuse their Assent to the ever-blessed Trinity, because it is a Mystery surmounting their shallow Capacities.

BUT alas! almost all Disputes, concerning Religion, have generally been owing to a false Judgment, or else to a busy, criminal Curiousness. A few staggering Probabilities (supported by the Weakness of human Interpretation) have revived Errors which have lain long dead; and those Controversies have been warmly debated in *This Age*, which the Authors of them were convicted in, and ashamed of in their *Own*.

BUT these are not the only Clouds that darken our Sagacity, and make us incapable of tracing the Footsteps of Divine Providence; Our *moral* Defects stand likewise in the Gap, and stop us in the forbidden Road which we would walk in.

THE Impurity of our Hearts (were we ever so free from other Failings) is enough to rob us of a necessary Qualification, towards viewing God in his special Dispensations.

The

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The Rectitude of our Will, is too much impaired, a requisite Patience too much weakened, and Passion grown so imperious over Reason, that we part with our Ease upon every trifling Disappointment. We are not quick-sighted enough to see into the remote End of God's all-wise Counsels, neither have we Patience to wait their Completion.

THAT Dulness of Apprehension, contracted from voluntary Indispositions; that Stupidity, arising from Clouds of Prejudice, or Steams of Passion, and that Rust which blunts the Understanding, and keeps us from forming true Judgments, These seldom suffer us to apprehend the most obvious Notions, but put us upon denying the most powerful Arguments with Obstinacy, and upon persisting in it, in Opposition to the very Convictions of Conscience.

OUR Minds in this Case are corrupted with prejudicate Notions; the Truth is gradually hid from our Eyes, and so strong a Byass laid upon our Inclinations, that, by our Choice and Consent, we are almost necessarily led into Error. In such a Condition, 'till our Breasts are cleansed of such Pollution, what Progress can we hope to make in Virtue? Or to what Perfection can we ar-

Sermon the Third 57

five in any Thing, but Immorality, or downright Disbelief?

AND notwithstanding Man is thus surrounded with Infirmary; weak by Nature, and (what brings him under the greatest Censure) *morally* infirm; yet all these Circumstances cannot dissuade him from a criminal Fondness of his own Abilities, nor prevail with him to think of himself with Humility.

PRIDE (the certain Token of a Person's wanting Sense) is one of the principal Impediments in our Search after Knowledge; and, amidst all our other moral Failings, is the most dangerous as well as erroneous. Were our Days spent in Thought, or in endeavouring to pass impartial Judgments upon the Affairs of Life, Human Vanity would soon be cooled, more humble Thoughts *would dwell within us*, and we should be convinced that what *We* termed Knowledge, was nothing but the faint Shadow of it, *Fancy and Conjecture*.

BUT this busy Principle within puts us upon the Pursuit of impossible Good; We are constantly chasing *That* Happiness which cannot be found, and (to distinguish our moral Imperfections) disquiet ourselves about
H Things

Things which are not only Impossibilities but Unnecessaries likewise.

THE warin Debates and useless Enquiries concerning Liberty and Necessity; The Ends of God; reconciling his Proceedings with human Inclinations, and accounting for the Difficulties of Prescience and Contingency; These, and many of the like Nature, employ the Thoughts of Men; tho' they have not any Prospect of Satisfaction from thence; their Ideas being too much confused ever to comprehend them.

ALL this while the great Business of Life lies neglected; That necessary Knowledge which tends to advance the moral Conduct of Man, to conquer his Passions, and direct him to Happiness, is laid aside as indifferent and useless; and nothing thought considerable, or worth his looking after, but what will puzzle him, or occasion his Disturbance.

KNOW thy Self the wise Grecians esteem'd an Oracle from the Mouth of God: And nothing sure! would more effectually correct the Insolence of Man, than a Contemplation of this Nature. It would convince him of all his mistaken Enquiries, and employ him sufficiently in the necessary Business of chastising himself. It would discover to him his
own

Sermon the Third. 59

own Unworthiness; acquaint him that *he was a Worm, and no Man*, and reduce that Longing after *unlawful Knowledge* into a decent Contentedness with what is *necessary*. It would instruct him in those Bounds that divide Opinion from Certainty; confine him to the Enquiry of the Extent of his own Capacity, and teach him to sit down in a contented Ignorance of those Things, which surmounted the Reach of his Knowledge and Nature. —

IN short; such a becoming Opinion of our own Unworthiness, would make us truly Valuable in the Opinion of others: If mean or Indigent, it would be a recommending Quality, and if advanced to any Degrees of Honour or Preferment, it would then be a very shining and amiable one. *Pride* amidst Grandeur does but expose a Man to Contempt, whilst *Humility* in that Station adds Glory to his Greatness.

THE Words of the Son of *Syrach* in the Book of Ecclesiasticus may be a proper Conclusion to my present Subject. — ‘He that wanteth Understanding, will think upon vain Things; and a foolish Man erring, imagineth Follies.’

Second Part

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...but expose a Man's ...
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The Words of the Son of David in the
Book of Ecclesiastes may be a proper Con-
clusion to my present Subject. — It is this
...will think upon
...and a foolish Man ...
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The Manifestation of CHRIST
to the GENTILES necessary to
Eternal Happiness.

S E R M O N IV.

ISAIAH, xlix. 6.

*It is a light Thing that thou shouldst be my
Servant to raise up the Tribes of Jacob,
and to restore the preserved of Israel: I
will also give Thee for a Light to the
Gentiles, that thou mayst be my Salvation
unto the End of the Earth.*

THE Children of Israel sustained a
very considerable Loss in the Death
of their experienced General *Joshua*. His
prudent Conduct and Administration; His
real Concern for the Welfare of his People,
and (under the Divine Direction) his Suc-
cess in Battle; These were Points which
naturally claimed Respect and Veneration;
and

2 *Sermon the Fourth.*

and His compassionate Advice, with his dying Breath, would have promoted their Felicity (had it been observed) after God was pleased to remove Him from Them.

THE Words of a departing Friend generally make a lasting Impression on the Mind. He cautioned them in the most tender and affectionate Manner never to deviate from a punctual Observance of the Laws of God; under whose Protection they had frequently been rescued from the most terrifying Dangers; had triumphed over the most formidable Enemies, and, from a low Rank, been carried into Credit, and into the Possession of a most plentiful Land.

BUT too transient is the Memory of past Favours; Gratitude is apt too soon to grow old, and present Enjoyments to remove our Thoughts from Blessings received! They became like a City that is not at Unity within Itself: Their Tribes were divided into separate Governments, and, instead of joining against their common Enemies, they quarrelled with each other, and lessened their Numbers by an unnatural Animosity.

THE War of Israel with the Benjamites is a Tragical Instance, without examining their History any further. In two several Engagements

Engagements the inferiour Tribe got much the Advantage: Forty Thousand *Israelites* fell in the Battle; owing to nothing but their presumptive Confidence, relying on *Numbers* instead of applying to their God, who had crowned them before with Victory and Success.

BUT the Restoration of their Tribes was the least Part of our Saviour's Divine Legation and Office. *The Heathen* was to be *His Inheritance* and the utmost Parts of the *Earth His Possession*. His Gospel was not to be confined to the few Remains of *Israel*; but his Preaching was to be glad Tidings of great Joy to *All People*; to be as a divine and spiritual Sun to illuminate the whole World, whose salutary Beams were intended to influence and to comfort the remotest Corners of the Earth.

A BLESSING This! which confutes what a Few fanciful *Elect* would otherwise have made the Foundation of a ridiculous Doctrine; and what We Ourselves, the Descendants from the Gentile World, ought (on this Day in particular) with Gratitude to reflect on and to admire with Thanksgiving.—In discoursing therefore on this Subject (as the Text naturally suggests to Us that, before the Manifestation of Christ, Mankind

Mankind was in a State of dangerous Ignorance) I shall enquire

First, WHETHER there were not some Points necessary to Eternal Happiness, which the Philosophy of the Heathen World could not of Itself discover to Them? And

Secondly, If it shall appear that this Incapacity was removed by Christ's Manifestation, a Deduction or Two, made from thence, may serve as a Conclusion to this Discourse.

A PROPER Knowledge of God and Ourselves, as it is the Foundation of all Religion, so, without it, we can discover no Way to Happiness. In both These and many other necessary Points to Salvation, so blind and deficient were They of the Heathen World, that it greatly enhances the Merit of the Divine Goodness, and demands our greatest Regard for the Blessing of Revelation.

MAN, even in a State of Innocence, free from Passion, unbiaſſed by Temptation, and blessed with the most uncorrupted Reason, was at *that* Time ignorant of the real Cause of his own Existence. His rational Faculty, tho'

Sermon the Fourth,

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tho' eminently bright, and still pushing him on to Enquiry, was not always gratify'd in its Researches; and, it is well known, that the curious Attempt of being wiser than his Reason could make him, lessen'd his Knowledge, and enlarg'd the Ignorance of Him and his Posterity.

BUT that the Enemies of Christianity should raise no Objection against the Creator, or the Creature thus made, "it has been judg'd necessary to believe that *Adam* was supply'd with as much Knowledge as was expedient for his Nature and Condition either by Inspiration, by secret Impulse, or Angelical Ministration."

I ONLY mention This to shew that there is Room to suspect the Perfectness of Human Reason, in the most *untainted State*, without the Interposition of Divine Help, in many Points essential to our Ease and Happiness.—But it is sufficient at present to take a cursory View of it in its *corrupted Condition*.

THE Heathen had a just Notion that the whole Race of Mankind had incurred the Divine Displeasure; and consequent on the Offence, a violent Apprehension of Punishment continually filled them with Trouble and Perplexity.

I

BUT

BUT *what* was the Occasion of this general Distemper, or *what* would contribute to their Relief under it; How to reinstate Themselves in God's Favour, when They knew not the Origin of Evil, or free Themselves from That Vengeance which They naturally dreaded, and from what Cause it proceeded They knew *not*; This was what the sublimest Pitch of their Philosophy could never reach, and under which Disorder un-assisted Reason was forced to bend.

FROM this Uncertainty some Persons have dated the Original of Sacrifices; and tho' it was a Practice not likely to have its desired Effect, yet, we find, it was the best which their Reasoning suggested to them, in order to pacify an offended Deity. Thus not knowing what Steps to take in order to trace out Happiness, the Wisest amongst them were forced to deplore their unhappy Situation, and be still wandering in a Maze of Mistake.

SOME of Them, it must be allowed, had their Reasoning Talent in as much Perfection, and formed as proper Judgments as any of our modern Advocates for Reason; and, in investigating Truth, out-did Them in one excellent Qualification for that Purpose, I mean the Virtue of Sincerity; But
still

still They were Strangers to many momentous Points relating to Happiness. The Eminence of their Knowledge might probably be founded in some Degrees of Revelation, more than in the Strength of their own Reason; and their Superiour Light might rise from Tradition, or some such Cause.

God Almighty, we know, communicated some Part of his Will by *Moses* to the Jews: And, as Curiosity put many of the Sages upon improving their Understanding, it might put them upon seeking the Conversation of such Persons who had received the Benefit of Revelation, and thus They might excel many Others in Wisdom.

How Mankind came into Being; how the Frame and Constitution of all Things became so regular and beautiful; how the Separation of Light from Darkness was effected, and from what Period the Original of Created Beings was to be dated; So many Debates arose from these Enquiries, and so many different Tenets were espous'd about them, that this very Confusion proclaimed the Insufficiency of human Reason, and is an engaging Motive to our admiring and believing a Divine Revelation.

WHAT Errors and Perplexity did not these

these very Points lead the Pagan Enquirers and Philosophers into? Did not the *Peripateticks* contend that all Things were eternal; and the *Epicureans* impute every Thing to Fortune and Casualty? Did not the most intelligent Sects among Them, who came into the Opinion that every Thing must have had a Beginning of Existence, remain in a continued State of Ignorance, with Regard to the Method of their rising first from a blended Confusion into Form and Beauty?

SENECA (remarkable for his moral Attainments) in One of his Epistles gives his *Wise-Man* much the Preference to his God. *Est aliquid* (says he) *quo Sapiens antecedit Deum.* Ille Naturæ Beneficio, non Suo Sapiens est. And Tully (in his Book of Laws) encourages Men to persevere in their Idolatrous Worship, and not to vary in their Observance of the Laws, which required Obligations to different Deities.

SUCH strange Notions had these shining Men amongst the Antients of the Nature as well as the *Worship* of God, that They had a bad Prospect of ever appeasing him by the One, or making any proper Discoveries of the Other.

A SLIGHT Acquaintance with the Writings

Sermon the Fourth. 69

ings of *Moses*, had discovered to some and prevailed with them to believe that Man was at first created by God; But They, amongst Them, who had never met with such Instruction, nor made any Improvement, but in their licentious Principles, remained so ignorant in most of the necessary Points to Happiness, that *Democritus* put the Existence of Man on the same Footing with the Epicurean Cause of the World.

THAT the Felicity of Men depends on their own Union with the Original of their Existence, or in the Enjoyment of Their first Being, is what every rational Creature must allow. This is the proper Produce of all Virtue; the best Reward of all Religious Conduct, and the great End or principal Design of it.—But how should *They* be capable of such Enjoyment, whose Ignorance of the Divine Nature, as well as That of their own Souls, made it utterly impracticable ever to discover a Method (by the Strength of their Reason) of accomplishing an Agreement between an offended God and their own offending Souls,

COULD their Moral Philosophy have reformed the Soul, and qualified it for God's Favour and perfect Happiness; or had the Practice of Moral Virtues which *That* Philosophy

lofophy pretends to cultivate, been capable of effecting fuch a Reformation, our Saviour's Embaffy and the Promulgation of his Gospel had been unnecessary; and the Gentiles would have had Light enough (without His Manifeftation) by which to have fteer'd their Courfe to Happinefs.

BUT the Vanity of fuch Pretences appears from Their unfettled Notions about it. Their improper Conceptions of God's Nature; Their multiplying His *Effence* and robbing him of his *Simplicity*; The irreconcilable Difputes which filled Their Schools, and the endless Controverfies in their Writings about their Chief Good, and the Methods of attaining it, extorted a Declaration from *Porphyry*, that there was no pofitive Rule to be hit on; that nothing but Uncertainty attended their beft Enquiries, and that They were groping as in Darknefs after *That* - *Reft*, which none of them, by the Strength of Reason, could difcover. In fhort; Their moft eminent Authors lamented their Ignorance; They difclaimed all haughty, ambitious Pretences, and, after a diligent Scrutiny, concluded their Knowledge to be at beft but Conjecture.

Nor were their Notions lefs confufed

used concerning the Immortality of the Soul, and the Resurrection of the Body.

CICERO, justly remarkable for his excellent Maxims relating to Moral Life, the most lovely Plan of which, we find, contained in his Book of Offices, in the Point before Us was very deficient. He neglected to give those Sanctions to his Moral Duties, which would have made his Rules of Virtue as remarkable for their *persuasive Force* as now They appear excellent for their *Beauty* only.

IN the first Book of his Tusculan Questions he confesses his Uncertainty of the Immortality of the Soul, and makes it a *desired Point*, rather than what They could prove: And in his Oration for *Cluentius*, before an august Assembly in an open Court, he represents the Doctrine of a future State, and the Punishment of wicked Souls therein as a *meer Fiction* and somewhat very *fabulous*.

THE Doctrine of the Resurrection never met with the least Reception: Some Chimerical Writers had indeed imposed upon them a Notion that departed Souls had a Place to go to below, where they cloathed themselves with airy Bodies after the Dissolution

lution on Earth; but the Re-union with the real Body which it left behind, was what They never attempted to nurse into Hope, but made the Relation of it the Subject of their Ridicule and Diversion. St. Paul no sooner preach'd to Them Jesus and the Resurrection, but he was stigmatized with the Name of a vain Babblcr.

Thus lay the Pagan World surrounded with Uncertainty and lost in Error. Their deepest Researches gave them no Relief, and fresh Discoveries, like false Lights, seduced their Steps and lead them on Precipice.

BUT when the Son of Righteousness rose with Healing under his Wings to cure these Maladies raging amongst Men; the Doctrines of Christianity began to dawn; the Light of Salvation dispell'd the Heathen Darkness, and open'd to them the beautiful Prospect of Felicity. Reason and Philosophy, the two great (but erring) Supports of human Hope, became very much improv'd, and were able to assist Men in the Belief of those Doctrines, concerning which (of Themselves) They were capable of giving them no Manner of Conception. The Amendments likewise in Point of Duty, and the Motives directing to it, proved the Excellency

tellency of that great Blessing, *Divine Revelation*. It not only discovered to us our real Misery, but it gave us a true Account of the Oecasion of it; and, as a valuable Friend, prescribed a Remedy for so malignant a Distemper. It taught us that we were not made for no End at all; but that the Service of God was to be our Study and Delight, and that our Returns of Praise were to be adjusted in Proportion to the Favours, which He in his Mercy should confer upon us.

WITHOUT the Direction of Divine Grace, we should be by Nature incapable of discovering the saving Knowledge of the Almighty, and we should feel after Felicity in the same ignorant Manner, as *Sampson* did for the Pillars of the House, when he had no kind Hand to shew him the Way.

BUT the Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the Soul, and it giveth *That* Wisdom to the Simple, which, by Nature, They could not have. It is profitable to teach, to correct, to exhort, to convince; that the *Man of God* may be perfect to every good Work. It is a Book in which all our Members are written: It is the Power of God to Salvation to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile.

THE Matter of it is holy, and its Style majestick; remarkable for its persuasive Simplicity without Affectation, and yet more prevalent on the Affections than the most finished Periods of the choicest Orator. — It gives us Light into those Points which natural Reason never aim'd at; with Regard to the Fall, to universal Redemption, to the Love which we owe God in this World, and the Felicity we shall find in the other. — Such Heavenly Light shines in the Holy Scriptures, that They, who peruse them with Humility, and devoutly consult them, will find them *a Light unto their Feet*, and that They are *able to make them wise unto Salvation*.

IN these sacred Oracles we have the Mercies of God display'd to win us into Duty, and Judgments recorded to deter us from the Commission of what is evil. The commendable Actions of good Men are herein related to excite our Emulation, and the remarkable Punishment of some Offenders to affect us with Apprehension, lest We also fall into the like Condemnation. — They contain nothing but what prohibits Indecency and Sensuality in every Shape; They encourage no beastly Idols to be worshipped as God, (a known Principle in the Heathen

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Sun - the 1st day of the month

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

HAD We not *known* God's Will, it

viction, and to shut our Eyes against the clearest Light; To fail in our Duty when the Lines of it are drawn (as it were) with a Sun-beam, is an Aggravation of an unpardonable Nature, and what Tyre and Sidon may as well hope to find Mercy for in the Day of Judgment.

A HEATHEN Nineveh repented at the Preaching of the Prophet Jonas; the whole City was cloathed in Sackcloth, and cry'd mightily unto God; They turned every one from the Evil of his Ways, and from the Violence that was in their Hands,

FROM this single Instance we may discover the Turpitude of our own Behaviour, when, in Defiance of the Means of Grace, we continue unreclaimed, and refuse even the Direction of the holy Spirit. Let us never plead Ignorance for our Omissions in Point of Duty; because *That* must be an *Aggravation* instead of an *Excuse*. For "He that knows his Lord's Will, and does it not, is the Servant that shall be beaten with many Stripes,

THE *Jews*, under the Dispensation of *Moses*, did not behold that Fullness of Light, which was sent to enlighten the Gentile World; and yet the *Jews*, who obeyed

Sermon the Fourth. 77

obeyed not the Commandment of Moses, shall receive the sad Reward of their Disobedience.

THIS single Reflection may move Us in our Duty; least We should provoke That Lord, who was manifested for our Deliverance, to appear the second Time to our Condemnation.

BUT, *Secondly,*

SINCE Christ's Manifestation was to make known the Will of God to Mankind, and That Revelation is contained in the Holy Scriptures, a sacred Regard is certainly due to those Books from every one, who is so happy as to have the Opportunity of perusing them.

AND yet what Reason have we to think so, from the too prevalent and fashionable Vice of scoffing at Religion!

THE very Design of Wit is to sweeten Society, and unbend the Mind from too close and severe Applications; To cause a Cheerfulness and promote Good-nature in social Life, and to expel the greatest Bane of it, Care and Sollicitude, Thus far Facetiousness

ness in Conversation is a commendable Quality.

BUT when it is not kept within proper Bounds; when it trespasses on Reason, and breaks in upon Decency; when Reputation must be its Victim, or childish Mirth its proposed End; in one Case it may be termed Cruelty, in the other, it deserves the Name of Folly. "*Tenuissimus ingenii Fructus*," as Tully styles Laughter, when an Orator is pleas'd with so mean a Reward.

BUT They who glory in making *Scripture* the Subject of ludicrous Wit, are Men that court low Applause by Means which are shameful; and shew their Emptiness by the Trifle they aim at.

THE frothy Bubble naturally floats on the Surface; and prophane Jestings is a Weed that grows only in a barren Soil. Want of Thought leads Youth into an Abuse of Wit; and They, who cannot be ingenious without Indecency, nor witty without being prophane, betray a Meanness of Invention, and come justly under the Censure of *Solomon*, who tells us that every Fool will be babbling.

BUT the Abuse of the Holy Scripture, by
such

such unthinking Creatures, is no Argument against its being made a sacred Use of by Men of Sense.

LET our weak Reason therefore be cloathed with Humility, and never be set up in Opposition to Revelation. Some Points in the Gospel, no doubt, are too sublime for the Reach of natural Reason; but now They are discovered to Us, They call for our greatest Respect, having nothing in Them either incongruous or impossible. Instead of being made the Subject of Drollery or Dispute their very Sublimity demands our Admiration.—We may as well hope to *measure the Ocean in the Hollow of our Hands*, or with human Strength *weigh the Hills in a Ballance*, as with the most penetrating Genius of Man upon Earth, of itself, to discover the Mysteries of Heaven; *the Judgments whereof are like the great Deep*, and the Ways of the Almighty *past finding out*.

LET us read these Holy Writings with Reverence; consider the Subject of them with Care, and study them with Attention; and then we shall discover nothing in them offensive to Reason. We shall find them majestick and worthy of God; weaning us from the World, and conducting us to Perfection;

fection; contributing so much to the Aim of our rational Nature, that we should be charmed with the Beauty of them, and adore the Goodness of God for the Manifestation of his Will for his Creatures Felicity. In a Word: We shall endeavour to answer the Design of this * Day's Blessing; and let our own Lights so shine before Men, that They may see us engaged in good Works, and be influenced to glorify our Father which is in Heaven.

* Epiph.



(81)

The Forgiveness of an Injury superior to Revenge.

S E R M O N V.

R O M. xii. 19.

Dearly Beloved avenge not Yourself; but rather give Place unto Wrath: For it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord,

THE Gospel of Christ was intended to promote Peace and Unanimity amongst Men; to compose the jarring Principles of Discord into Harmony, and to unite all human Affections, as Men were united by it into one Body, and become Members one of another.

AGREEABLE to this we find our Blessed Lord (who was the Head and Governor of this Mystical Union) giving a positive and particular Command, in the Point of Of-
L fence,

fence, to forgive a Brother *until seventy Times seven*; and requiring the Love of our Enemies as a Pledge of our Gratitude to Himself, making it in an especial Manner *his Law and Commandment*.

THE best of the Heathen World never arrived to this Pitch of Sublimity: Their most exalted and lofty Precepts fell infinitely short of this Perfection of Charity; tho' at the same Time, many of their Doctrines wanted no Elegance to recommend them to the Notice and Esteem of Mankind.

THE great Apostle of the Gentiles breathes the same Spirit of Love and Tenderneſs, which daily proceeded from the Mouth of his Master; and of all his Writings, this very Chapter, from whence my Text is taken, seems more peculiarly calculated to heal the Animosities and Divisions of Men; and which, if made the Subject of our serious Reflections, would effectually answer the End, for which it was intended,

THIS then being the Apostle's Design, to prevent the returning Evil for Evil, and to promote the more heroick and Christian Bravery of repaying Evil with Good; of blessing them which persecute us, and of giving Place unto Wrath, rather than avenging ourselves

Sermon the Fifth. 83

ourselves upon Those who have injured Us, it may not be improper (in order to support the Christian Doctrine of Patience and Forgiveness under Injuries, against That of Revenge) if

First; I ENQUIRE briefly; whether the prohibiting Revenge be not agreeable to the Light of Nature, as well as to the Religion revealed by Christ?

Secondly, If I endeavour to make it appear that to forgive an Injury is in itself more noble; and a Happiness superior to that of the sweetest Revenge: And,

Lastly, If I consider the contrary Doctrine as unreasonable in itself and very sinful.

As for Revenge, the Antients have given us so many different Accounts of it, that it is difficult from their dubious and odd Descriptions of it, to discover any Thing at all of its true Nature and Meaning.

SOMETIMES it is painted as a Passion of the Mind, occasioned and call'd for by Justice itself: Which Opinion *Plato* espouses literally in his Book of Laws; and makes it as necessary to be observed, as any moral

84 *Sermon the Fifth*

Duty whatever. Sometimes it is placed between two vicious Extremes, such as *Cruelty* on the one Hand, and *base Abjection of Spirit* on the Other: This no doubt induc'd *Aristotle*, and many of his Followers, to give it the Name of a positive Virtue.

It is no Wonder it should be favoured or propagated zealously by the Mahometan Religion, and looked upon as a wicked Thing to neglect it, inasmuch as *That* (if such a Collection of Beastliness deserves so sacred a Name) is known to be founded upon Ill-Nature and Cruelty, and whose Original was owing to Injury and Violence.

BUT it is (or at least seems to be) as surprising on the other Hand, that the *Stoicks* should encourage so inhuman a Principle, when, amidst their most sublime Precepts of Morality, the Pardoning, or even Pitying any Offender is made inconsistent with the Character of a truly wise Man.

PARDON, says *Seneca*, (in his Treatise of *Clemency*) is the Remitting of Punishment deserv'd: It is pardoning therefore a Transgressor who ought to be punished; which no wise Man can be guilty of.—'Tis pity the Moralist should argue thus in the Defence of Revenge, in a Book, whose Title suggests
to

to us a more amiable Doctrine. We find him speaking in a different Manner in his Treatise of Anger, when He assures Us there is no injurious Person whatever, but what a cool Consideration will give us Reason enough to put a Stop to our Revenge upon him.—

“Aut Potentior, aut Imbecillior, læsit, si imbecillior, parce Illi; si Potentior Tibi.”

MANY other Passages have been industriously extracted from Heathen Writers, by some modern Unbelievers, in order to shew that Revenge was not prohibited by the Light of Nature, but that it was peculiar to the Christian Religion and Gospel Dispensation. But had they been as diligent in selecting what the same Authors had said of *Forgiveness*, They would have found a sufficient Answer to themselves, and been convinced that the Religion of Nature was not contradicted, but greatly improved by the Religion of Jesus.

NAY, those very Authōrs which have been cited as favouring and applauding this Principle, have in other Passages been as earnest in the Condemnation of it: And notwithstanding this carries with it the Face of Contradiction, yet it may easily be reconciled to make those Writers consistent with Themselves.

THUS

THUS in Opposition to what we have observed of the Philosopher, in making Revenge a positive Virtue, we find him in his *Ethicks* describing the Man of a generous Disposition by μεγαλ-ψυχος, & μνησικακος, & ἡμιόρτιος. A Person not given to resent Injuries, nor to be avenged of those who did them; making it a Part of that Man's good Character, who is thus inclined to forgive Offences.

So likewise even in Holy Writ, *David* rejoyces when he seeth the Vengeance, and washes his Feet in the Blood of the Ungodly. Whereas *Job* rejoyced not at the Destruction of Him who hated him, nor lifted up himself when Evil found him.

PITY and Compassion may greatly affect us to see Men under Afflictions, which in Themselves may be very just; and yet it may be lawful to rejoyce at those Afflictions, (not as revenging our particular Injuries) but as they are Accomplishments of the Justice of God.

BESIDES; Revenge considered as a *Passion*, may in different Circumstances, as it is properly exercised, or wrongfully made use of, be either a Vice or a Virtue. To de-
fire;

fire, or indeed to occasion some Inconvenience or Trouble to fall upon the Person who has done us some Hurt, (considered in an abstracted Sense) is not in itself wicked: We may do this without any particular View to our own particular Injury done us; We may have no other Design than the Amendment of the Transgressor; and so far our easy Chastisement may be commendable and virtuous; and our Rejoicing that it befalls him, in this Sense, will be lawful. The Publick Welfare may likewise be concerned; Contempt of Laws may make Punishment necessary; and the inflicter of it (instead of being guilty of Revenge) will be rather a Distributor of necessary Justice. 'Tis the *Sin*, not the *Person*, which comes under Displeasure, and the Correction of it, is only repairing a Breach, which has been made against the Authority and Honour of the Law.

A PROPER Distinction therefore being preserved betwixt the *Study of Revenge* and a discreet *Endeavour for Reparation*, all the seeming Inconsistency of the Antients would vanish at once, and the Gospel Prohibition of a persecuting Revenge, would appear to be only (what it really is) an Improvement of what Men were taught by the Light of Nature.—*Laus Humanitatis* (says Quintilian)

tilian) *potius quàm Voluptas Ulkionis concupiscenda est*; And the Heathen Moralist (in his Book of Anger) makes this Difference only betwixt the Revenger and the Provoker, that they both offend, only the former has the excuse of having been irritated. And in another Place, *Non dubitabo dicere eum magis esse improbum, qui illatam ulciscitur, quàm qui infert Injuriam.*

THESE few Quotations, I hope, will be sufficient for the Point proposed to be enquired into; without selecting Passages (which would be almost endless) from the numerous Catalogue of Heathen Writers.

THE Prohibition therefore of Revenge being thus discoverable from the Light of Nature, I proceed in the

Second PLACE to make it appear that to forgive an Injury is in itself more noble, and a Happiness superior to that of the sweetest Revenge.

A PRUDENT and discreet Government of our Passions, with a fixed Resolution to maintain our Temper, disappoints an Enemy, notwithstanding his repeated Endeavours to weary us out of it. He will be depriv'd of that hop'd-for Satisfaction of
seeing

seeing us managed by an unruly Spirit, and carried headlong into Mischief by a turbulent Temper. His Scheme to ruffle us will be quite fruitless and lost, which must be instrumental in the Vexation and Torment of Himself.

THUS keeping Possession of the Peace of our Minds, and looking down with a noble Contempt upon the Injuries we receive, as incapable of giving us any Disturbance, we shall gain a Victory over our Adversary without an Engagement, or striking a Blow. Instead of gratifying his Desire by an unsuccessful Revenge, we shall consume his Fury by a prudent Delay. The Generosity of our Forgiveness will demand the Reverence and Love of Mankind; whilst Reproach and Infamy will brand His Character, who can neither *forgive* nor *forget* an Injury.

To sheath a Sword after it is drawn, to stop in the Midst of a Pursuit, and to drop our Wrath when the Instruments of Revenge are in our Hands, carries with it something Great and Heroical; shews a much greater Instance of a noble Spirit, than to run madly on to destroy, or to trample upon an Enemy, when fallen under us.

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DAVID

DAVID appear'd in a more beautiful Light, when he was pacify'd by the prudent Submission of *Nabal's* Wife, than when he swore he would cut off every one that pertained to *Nabal* before the Morning Light.

THE Affront offer'd him was doubtless very grating, and what, he might indeed then imagine, would justify his Revenge. But it prov'd no Grief unto him afterwards that he had not avenged himself; but gave him Pleasure, rather than Offence, that he had not shed Blood. Had he pursued his Resolution, he would have lamented the Effects of it, and it would have brought down *his grey Hairs with Sorrow to the Grave*. It being a Truth ever to be depended upon, that the Mind will be restless after so violent a Shock, whilst for checking a Passion, it will never reproach us. It will reflect on itself with great Pleasure, from a Conscience of having acted agreeable to Reason, and done *That*, which will be rewarded with its own continual Approbation.

To retaliate for every Wrong that is done us, does but continue our Quarrels and sharpen our Animosities. A Wound may be kept open too long, and the Cure of Course protracted; whilst a skilful Application of a healing Medicine would not only have
cleans'd

cleans'd it, but closed it effectually. The Return of one Injury is generally urg'd as a Reason for another, and serves as a Plea for the Repetition of it: In which Sense Men proceed from Evil to Evil; the Resentment against each other is thus carried to Extremity, till the Breach is made too wide to admit of Reparation.

A FORGIVING Temper prevents these Disorders; goes forth to meet its Enemy with Kindness, and inclines him to draw near on His Part, to make up a Division, which He must be ashamed to keep open any longer. To this our Forgiveness, if we add our real Endeavours to behave as his Friend, either in vindicating his Character or repairing his Loss, his Enmity will become grievous to Himself, and he will be conquer'd by such Goodness as cannot be resisted. Tho' his Heart was hardened against the Impression, yet if we continue heaping such Coals upon his Head, They must in Time melt him into Tenderness, and kindle in him the Sparks of Love and Gratitude. Reflections upon his past Baseness will sometimes open the Way for Remorse, and such repeated Benevolence from the Person whom he has injured, will make him sensible of the great Obligation he lies under to be grateful for it.

AN unexceptionable Instance we find recorded in Scripture (to convince us that there are scarce any so bad, but what will be influenced by such a Behaviour) in the Person of *Saul*. 'Tis plain he was possess'd by an evil Spirit, in bearing Malice and Envy against innocent *David*: And yet notwithstanding his bitter Hatred and fixed Resolution to take away his Life, when *David* restrained his Men from killing him (which they might have done with the greatest Secrecy) *Saul* says unto him, *Thou art more righteous than I am: For thou hast rewarded Me Good, whereas I rewarded Thee Evil.* And when *David* suffered him to escape a second Time; He said, *I have sinned, I will no more do thee Harm: I have play'd the Fool, and erred exceedingly.*

Thus He conquer'd the Spirit of his Enemy by the prevailing Weapons of Benevolence and Forgiveness; and made a more noble Conquest over his Passion, than if he had signalized himself by taking a City. He, *that thus ruleth his own Spirit, is better than the mighty; and Anger (Solomon tells us) resteth in the Bosom of Fools.*

To love our Enemies, and to do good to them who hate us, may possibly by many be

be judg'd severe Precepts ; but still they are Precepts, which may be observed, and with a proper Limitation may be observed with Pleasure. We ought to make our Charity as universal as possible ; And notwithstanding the Offender may not be reclaimed by it, yet we shall have the Satisfaction of having done our Best towards it, and that the Guilt of Non-compliance will be imputed to *Him* only.

OUR Consciences in this Point will acquit and discharge us, and our Endeavours will meet with a general Applause : Our Works of Mercy will be laid up in a faithful Remembrance, and those Injuries, which we have patiently endured, and prudently thus requited, We shall be amply rewarded for at the general Audit of Accounts ; whatever ill Success may attend our Labours, in Endeavouring to reclaim an ungrateful World. We shall have acted agreeable to the Command of a dying Saviour ; and have the *Pleasure* as well as *Reward* of having given an Instance of Gratitude to That our great Benefactor, who is risen from the Grave for this our Justification.

ONE Motive more there is to the Practice of Forgiveness of Injuries, (*viz.*) that it is copying the infinite Goodness of God,
and

and the wonderful Love of a Saviour, who died for us.

THE Almighty has been pleased to give Mankind a more particular Manifestation of his *Goodness*, than of any other of all his Attributes. He shewed it eminently in the Work of Creation, continues it daily in his Care and Providence, and gave a wonderful Instance of it in the Mystery of our Redemption and Deliverance, before which we were lost to all Hopes of Happiness for ever. His Mercy shone forth in contriving the Means of our Salvation; at a Time too, when we had sold ourselves to work Wickedness, and took an unnatural Delight in opposing his Holy Spirit. When We had greedily embraced Misery, He shed his Pity upon us, and when we were Children deserving his Wrath, He made us the Children of Grace by Adoption. This calls aloud for our Gratitude and Adoration, and should incline us to forgive until Seventy Times Seven, as we can never fill up the Measure of his Forgiveness.

AND This brings me to consider

Lastly, THE Thing forbidden in my Text as unreasonable and sinful.

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WHEN I say Revenge is unreasonable, I mean that it is the Cause of such Effects, as a prudent Man would be ashamed of. *He that is soon angry (Solomon tells us) dealeth foolishly; The Fool rageth and is confident, and the Simple inherit Folly.* In all which Places He condemns a hasty Revenge, upon the first Surprise of Passion, when the Mind is chang'd into a Temporary Madness. Reason must be quite laid aside, before a Man can be guilty of it; He is driven about by a Storm that may dash him against his Enemy, and affect *Him* with some Hurt, but at the same Time it must be with more Damage to *Himself*. He rushes into the wildest Follies, only to enjoy the imaginary Pleasures of a Phrenzy; and quickly lays the Foundation of a lasting Sorrow. Upon Reflection He finds all his Faculties shattered and in Disorder, and discovers, tho' late, that he has heap'd together Matter sufficient for the deepest Repentance.

In order to convince us that this Behaviour is not agreeable to Good Nature, as it is improv'd by Christianity, our Saviour's Doctrine in the 6th Chapter of *St. Luke*, is I think sufficient.

LOVE ye your Enemies, do Good and lend,
hoping

hoping for nothing again, and your Reward shall be great in Heaven: Ye shall be like the Children of the Highest; for He is kind to the Unthankful and to the Evil.

BUT suppose He should not be thus hasty in his Proceedings, but should gratify his Desire after the Mind had deliberated on the Injury sustained; This, instead of a Justification, would aggravate his Offence, and make it very sinful. Mischief in this Case is the Subject of his Meditation; and 'till He has put his base Contrivance in Execution, the Temples of his Head are suffered to take no Rest.

THUS He usurps the Prerogative of Heaven; and takes the Power of Punishment out of His Hands, to whom Vengeance belongeth. *Vengeance is mine, I will repay,* saith the Lord.

AND 'tis happy for Mankind that to Him alone Power does belong; and that even the Authority of Those Persons (who have a derivative Power from him) are restrained by His infinite Wisdom, who only knows How and When to make Use of it.

WERE we left in this Case to act as Fancy should dictate; an unlimited Power and

and an arbitrary Will would be the only Determiners of Right and Wrong. We should be at a Loss to proportion the Penalty We inflict to the Injury complain'd of; Partiality would corrupt our Justice, and Self-Love would give every Thing in our own Favour, especially where Passion (that unequal Judge) suspends or excludes our Reason at Will.

AMIDST such Circumstances, the Ballance of Equity would be held by a very deceitful Hand; an honest Intention, Surprise, or Inadvertency would meet with little or no Favour; Men would be apt hastily to conclude the worst, and stop their Ears to the Cries of Compassion and Charity.

BUT suppose Vengeance was an indifferent Thing; what in our own Case we might innocently undertake, and judge in a Matter, which so nearly concerns us; would not Prudence put us in Mind of our Proneness to Mistake, and prevail with us to put Determinations into *His* Hands, who is free from Error: And who would act as we should desire, provided we did not ask amiss?

QUARRELS and Disputes, as they cannot but frequently arise, can be referred to no One better than to God; who either now,

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or at the last Day, will adjust the Inequality by so fair a Distribution, that we shall not be sorry that we with-held our Hand, when it was stretched out, and ready to execute Vengeance.

To engage us to forget the Provocations of others, the Almighty has been pleased to lay upon us the greatest Obligation, and the most likely one to prevail with us to observe this Duty. He has made our Readiness to forgive, a necessary Qualification for obtaining His Forgiveness. Our trifling Provocations one of another, are kindly put upon the same Level with our infinitely greater Offences against Him.

HAD Man been suffered in this Particular to have chosen Terms of Mercy for Himself, He could not reasonably have desired so great a Condescension. Let us but consider our Guilt, which renders us obnoxious to Divine Wrath, and lay our Trespases against each other in the opposite Scale, and we shall be forc'd to confess that These ought to be wip'd out of our Remembrance, whilst the Others should upbraid and accuse us for ever.

As the Inequality therefore is so great, and God at the same Time is so merciful as
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to promise Us His Pardon, if We extend Ours to an offending Brother; If we yet obey our Passion, rather than secure our eternal Interest, We shall charge our Maker with a foolish Fondness in cancelling our Injuries; and in taking upon us to avenge Ourselves, be guilty of a daring Degree of Sacrilege, such as will call for, and deserve the Vengeance of Heaven.

SINCE then the Prohibition of Revenge appears not to be an Institution peculiar to the Christian Religion, but made known to Men by the Religion of Nature; and since the contrary Doctrine of a Christian Forgiveness of Injuries is so amiable in itself, and productive of such happy Effects, it may not be an improper Enquiry for the best of us to make, whether our Practice has been agreeable to this Doctrine, or whether our Passions have not generally carried us beyond the Direction of Reason.

SHOULD we find ourselves upon the Scrutiny wanting or defective, one of the Levitical Laws might remind us of our Duty, and serve to set us forward in our Christian Profession: *Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any Grudge against the Children of thy People, but thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself.* And with Regard to their Estate as well as their

Persons, That Law in the Book of Exodus is altogether as cogent: If thou meet thy ENEMY'S Ox or his Ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.

LET us then upon the whole lament the Folly of Those who are our Enemies, and if their Folly be wicked, leave God to correct it. Let us remember that to receive an Injury is but an Assault made upon our Virtue, but to meditate Revenge shows that we are conquered. Patience and Forgiveness may be thought yielding to an Adversary; but a hasty Retaliating is (in the Expression of St. Paul) giving Place to the Devil. In Cases of Necessity 'tis our Duty to relieve him, but Christian Prudence tells us to join the Serpent's Wisdom with the Innocence of the Dove, that One may be secure under the Other's Protection.

IN short; Mercy is more acceptable to God than Sacrifice; a very small Share of which He receives from us, when we are bent upon Revenge, and are sacrificing the Person or Reputation of a Brother to our own passionate and unchristian Severity. If Affronts or Injuries should at any Time necessarily call for our Resentment, yet let us prudently be angry, but sin not.

(101)

The EXCELLENCE of RICHES considered,
when discreetly made Use of,

S E R M O N VI.

MARK X. 20, 21, 22.

Master, all these have I observed from my Youth.

Then Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, One Thing thou lackest, Go thy Way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the Poor, and thou shalt have Treasure in Heaven, and come, take up the Cross, and follow me;

And he was sad at that Saying, and went away grieved; For he had great Possessions.

ONE of the most surprising Instances of human Folly, and what indeed seems to carry a palpable Contradiction in itself, may easily be discovered in the Conduct of Man relating to his Interest. Self-preservation is an established and fundamental Principle

ciple of Nature, which inclines us to avoid every Thing that is hurtful, and embrace That which promises us Security. The Good which we propose to ourselves ('tis certain) ought to be valued by the Circumstances attending it; that where it appears great and very lasting, especially where we are convinced of its being Infinite and Eternal, there our most zealous Endeavours will become commendable; the most earnest Desires will never stand in Need of Defence, and the greater Treasure we heap together, the more laudable will be (if I may so term it) our religious Avarice.

BUT then on the other Hand, when we find any Flaw in the Good before us; when we see it uncertain, transitory and deceitful; our Regard ought to lessen upon the Discovery of such base Qualities, and whatever Proportion of Merit it wants, our Value and Love is to decay accordingly.

THESE are Rules taught us by Nature; and yet even Nature's Law, thro' a shocking Perverseness, or a slavish Disposition, is frequently broke through, under the ridiculous Pretence of keeping it most strictly. Hence, no doubt, it is that the sordid Wretch makes his Wealth his Refuge from all Misfortunes; thinks it a proper Skreen from the Intrusion
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of most of the accidental Disorders of Life; till at last he becomes so great a Dotard, as to take it for his Chief and greatest Good. Here Nature's Law is wrested beyond the Bounds of Reason; and this extravagant Endeavour, in the Behalf of our own Preservation, is but a meer Pretence to a Principle of Nature, as it excludes Charity from among the Principles of Religion.

How much Men have (and still do err) in this Point, the Person in the Text is an Instance sufficient to convince us. We are satisfied from the Account given of him in the foregoing Verses, that everlasting Happiness was the End of his Wishes; He had not only been diligent in his Enquiries after it, but very punctual too (if we may credit his own Words) in the Observance of those Precepts which (one would imagine) might have got it for him.

BUT so great an Ascendant his Wealth had gained over his Passions, that his Mind seem'd very much darken'd with regard to intellectual Knowledge; and his positively asserting that he had kept all the Commandments strictly from his Youth, was not the least Breach of them, which he had been guilty of in his Life Time. The Precepts which God delivered to *Moses* on the Mount
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not only required Obedience to Himself, but Love and Compassion towards our Fellow-Creatures: So that had the Young, rich Man in the Text been punctual in this Point, he had not been sorrowful at the Order of our Saviour, but would readily have parted with all that he had, rather than lose that Happiness which he was now enquiring after. But such was his Misfortune (shall I term it) or his Sin, that amidst the Possession of large Treasures (which would have contributed very much towards the promoting his Felicity) he was a Stranger to Happiness, because a Slave to a sordid Temper; And we may safely say, had he been as careful in keeping the Commandments as he was of his Wealth, he would freely have comply'd with, and embraced the Advice of our blessed Lord, and have loved his Neighbour as himself.—
 “ One Thing thou lackest:—Go thy Way;
 “ sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the
 “ Poor, and thou shalt have Treasure in
 “ Heaven:—And he was sad at that Say-
 “ ing, for he had great Possessions.”

In discoursing upon which Words I shall

First, EXPATiate a little on the Nature and Reasonableness of this Precept, insisted on by our Blessed Lord.

Secondly,

Secondly, I SHALL consider the Danger attending large Possessions, when they fall into the Hands either of a sordid, or a luxurious Person : And,

Thirdly, THE Excellency of them when discreetly and properly made use of.

ONE Remark may serve as a Conclusion, which shall be made on the rich Man's Behaviour at last, who was sad at the Advice of our Blessed Saviour, because he had large Possessions.

First, THEN, it is observable that this Injunction before us cannot be looked upon as universally binding ; because the Observance of it, when not particularly required, would carry so little in it of the Merit of Virtue that it would on the contrary be rather a Sin. To sell all that we have, and give it away, and industriously throw ourselves on Temptation, might be a glaring Proof indeed of our Contempt of the World, but would be no Instance either of our Honesty or Wisdom. Our Friends and Kindred would by this Means be neglected ; be deprived of a comfortable Subsistence in Life, and sensibly feel the Smart of Adversity, thro' the Ignorance of those who were proud of entailing Poverty on their Relations. All that

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we possess indeed is undoubtedly the Right and Property of God, by Virtue of that general Duty which we owe to him: But then as he has appointed some Things to be so, only by a special Call, or when particularly required of us; to part with all we have without that Order, would be more than Folly on the one Hand, as refusing it when call'd for, would be Sin on the other.

THE Injunction therefore before us seems to be only a personal Command of a private Nature, intended to expose the rich Man's Hypocrisy, who valued himself upon observing What was morally and naturally good, tho' he wanted that saving Grace which was necessary. He who boasted of his moral Integrity, that he had kept all such Duties from his Youth, was no sooner advis'd to sell what he had and give to the Poor, in order to qualify himself for his wish'd for Happiness, but he was presently dejected, and was very sorrowful, because very rich. The Strength of his boasted Righteousness soon discover'd itself, when this private Command was given him: Even Treasures in Heaven could not prevail with him to quit the Interest he had in the Things of this Life, and therefore he lays aside the Thoughts of saving his Soul at the Expence of his worldly Possessions.

SUCH

SUCH a particular Precept (as this was) We cannot ('tis certain) at this Time expect, now the Law-giver is ascended up on high, and rules us by his Spirit instead of his Presence. But still, should we, by the Direction of Providence, be reduc'd to a mean and indigent Condition, in Defyance of all our honest Endeavours to avoid it, then it may be in our Power to observe it decently as a particular Trial of our Patience; and a becoming Chearfulness under such an appointed Condition, would be a sufficient Testimony of a Readiness and Resolution to resign all that we enjoy'd, when commanded by the Almighty.

AND sure nothing unreasonable appears in this Precept. All that we enjoy is the Property of God by Virtue of his own Eminence and Prerogative. "I will return (saith the Lord in his reproofing the Idolatry of the People) and take away *my* Corn, and *my* Wine in the Season, and I will recover *my* Wool and *my* Flax, given to cover her Nakedness." All which he could dispose of as his *own*, without the least Breach of Justice in himself, or Injury to the People.

BUT what is all that we possibly can part with, when compar'd with the Advantages
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attending the Resignation. The very Reproach of Christ was looked upon by *Moses* as infinitely preferable to all the Treasures of *Egypt*; and all the pleasing Scenes of *Pharaoh's* House were readily quitted by him, when he discovered the Delights thereof stain'd with Sin. The Recompence of the Reward prevailed with him to suffer Affliction with the People of God, rather than enjoy the Pleasures of Sin for a Season.

HENCE then we may just observe that this was not an unreasonable Demand; that Heaven will amply make amends for the Absence or Loss of every thing here below; and that our Blessed Lord (considered as a Lawgiver) had an absolute Power to command this Thing without the least Injury to his Divine Perfection. The *Israelites* are to spoil at his Command, and *Abraham* to give up his only Son. The Strength of the Christian Principles is by this Method brought to the Test; and whoever sets his Affections so much upon Earthly Possessions, as not to resign all (when required) for the Sake of Christ, (according to his own Declaration) cannot be his Disciple; Which brings me to consider

Secondly,

Secondly, THE Danger of large Possessions, when they fall into the Hands either of a sordid or a luxurious Person.

AN immoderate Pursuit after Wealth and Riches generally arises either from an Apprehension of future Want, or else an inordinate Love of present Pleasure. Violence in either Case becomes a particular Vice, producing *Luxury* on the one Hand, or *Covetousness* on the other. These, once made the reigning Principles of human Actions, put Men upon raising fresh Supplies in order to gratify a craving Desire; and rather than undergo the least Disappointment whatever, the illegal Methods of Rapaciousness and Corruption, are looked upon as Practices both pleasing and profitable. Hence no doubt the Prophet exclaimed against Oppression arising from a sordid Temper: "And they covet Fields," (says he) "and take them by Violence;" "and Houses, and take them away: They oppress a Man in his own House, even a Man and his Heritage."

PROPOSE but thirty Pieces to Judas for a Reward, and even his Lord and Master shall fall a Sacrifice to his base Passion:

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For a Gratification of this Nature *Achan* could steal the Wedge and Babylonish Garment; and so much Convenience was discovered in a Neighbour's Vineyard, that *Ahab* could readily consent to *Naboth's* Murder, rather than be balk'd in what his Heart was set on.

WITH so much Danger is a fordid Temper surrounded, that no Crime is so black, nor Villany so inhuman, but Covetousness will gild it over, and easily reconcile it to the Thoughts of Men.

So likewise it fares in the Point of Luxury. Self-Denial to Men accustomed to Ease and Plenty is altogether as disagreeable as Rebuke to the Scornor. Through a lawless Liberty they become impatient of Contradiction; natural Pride and Selfishness render Restraints odious, and a Denial of Pleasure is not less Troublesome than serious Reflections upon the next Life. "I will get me (says *Jeremiah*) to the great Men, and will speak unto them; " But they have altogether broken the Yoke " and burst the Bonds of Loyalty and Obedience."

FOR fear of such Consequences attending Wealth we find *Agur* praying only for a Competency;

Sermon the Sixth. **III**

Competency : " Give me neither Poverty
" (says he) nor Riches ; feed me with Food
" convenient for me, least I be full and
" deny Thee, and say who is the Lord ?"
He was not for trusting in uncertain Ri-
ches ; Plenty, he apprehended, might breed
in him a Forgetfulness of his Maker, and
therefore he desired a moderate Fortune, as
least expos'd to Snares and Temptations.

BUT the Man of a Worldly and selfish
Mind is for no such Medium relating to
his Desires. That we should increase our
Fortune by giving it away, and become very
rich by being very generous, are doubtless
such Solæcisms in his Opinion as he never
will be able to reconcile to his Belief.
That seeming Paradox recorded in the Book
of Proverbs, that, "*there is that scattereth*
"*and yet increaseth,*" he concludes a Riddle
too intricate to be unfolded by any one, at
least of his Complexion. He dreams of no
other Method of Increase, than what pro-
duce immediate Profit : A present Diminu-
tion (tho' attended with the sure Hopes of
a more solid future Good) carries something
so harsh and disagreeable with it, that, to a
Mind trained up in this narrow Manner of
Thinking, "*Go sell that which thou hast,*
"*and give to the Poor,*" proves very grat-
ing Advice ; and where there are great Pos-
sessions,

essions, is received with Sorrow. So much Trouble he has met with in getting, and such Toil and Care in increasing it to what it is, that the Thoughts of parting with it are very disagreeable, and what, he is convinc'd, will yield him no Pleasure at all.

SUCH is the Nature of this Slavish Disposition, that, as it can never fix any Bounds to its Desires, but becomes violent by Indulgence; so it is not easily convinced of its Error, but prefers the Possession of earthly Trifles to the eternal Joys of Heaven in Reversion: That Apothegm of *Solomon*, that *Money answers all Things* being, by the Children of this World look'd upon, as one of the Wisest of all his Sayings.

THUS do a very considerable Part of Mankind embrace a notorious Falshood for a real Truth; fancying large Possessions of this World's Goods the most effectual Method of supplying their Wants, and satisfying their Desires: Whereas not only *Solomon*, but a greater than He was, has more than once assured us, that a prudent distribution of them to the Poor and Needy will be the best Proof we can give of their Excellency; best answer the End for which they were designed, and entitle us to a Return which will sufficiently make us amends for our
parting

Sermon the Sixth. 113

parting with them in this Manner: Which was the Third Thing I proposed to consider.

WAS there no Reward at all reserv'd in the next Life for the Discharge of this Duty, yet the bare Pleasure attending it in *This*, is enough to overthrow all selfish Notions. To a generous Temper nothing can be more agreeable than to employ our Abundance in Charitable Offices. Nature herself is a very powerful Orator within us, pleading daily against the Dictates of an unmerciful Behaviour; pressing closely upon us the Argument of Love, by which Means she asswages the Pain of her own Compassion, and pacifies the yearning Distress of her own Bowels.

To raise a Brother therefore grovelling in Misery, and expiring (as it were) for Want of Common Necessaries, is to rescue him seasonably from the Jaws of Death, and in a Manner endow him with a new Being. Tis an Act not unlike Creation itself; a Royal Prerogative which the Almighty communicates to Man, by which we become (what our first Parents foolishly attempted by Disobedience) *even as Gods*.

To be a Father to the Fatherless, and to lend an Ear to the Widow's Cry; To
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change the Groans of the Miserable into Songs of Joy, and those wicked Reflections on Providence (which Extremity has made some desperate enough to utter) into Acknowledgments of God's Care and Goodness towards us, was it not attended with any Prosperity here, must still be one of the greatest Pleasures of the Mind.

SICKNESS, Vexation and Disappointment, with many other unavoidable Accidents, will mix themselves (in Defiance of Mankind) with the most perfect, temporal Prosperity, and in some Degree sour the Relish of our Enjoyments. But *he that considereth the Poor and Needy, the Lord will rescue him in the Time of Trouble, and surely deliver him out of all.*

THE great Pattern of Patience, during the most severe Trial, when there was not a whole Part to be found in his Body, could comfort himself however that he had delivered *the Poor that cry'd unto him; the Fatherless and Him, that had none to help him.* It yielded him now in his Distress no small Degree of Pleasure, that, during the Time of his greatest Affluence, he had shewn Mercy and Compassion, and considered other Mens Conditions as his own.

WE need not enumerate Instances of this Sort recorded in Scripture, the Heathen World (of which I shall mention but one) affording enough for our present Purpose.— The celebrated *Cato*, amongst the antient Romans, could boast of it as the greatest Joy and Strenth of his old Age; and declare that nothing was more pleasing to him than the Conscience of a well-spent Life, and the Remembrance he had of the many Kindnesses he had done to his Fellow-Creatures.

AND indeed when Age shall begin to droop, and the Period of Life draw very nigh; when all past, inordinate Pleasures, shall prove Matter of Torment and Grief to us, and the Flowers of all worldly Glory be withered; when that Earthly Beauty, which we have been so long admiring, shall decay and be converted into Uglinefs and Deformity; the World and the Fashion of it pass away, and Death approach us with an eternal Summons; what a seasonable Comfort will arise from Reflections on our well-conducted Life; how will Death be divested of all it's Terror from this single Consideration, that we have faithfully improved the several Talents, which the Almighty was pleased to commit to our Care? We shall with Confidence take a Prospect of the other World, where we

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have

change the Groans of the Miserable into Songs of Joy, and those wicked Reflections on Providence (which Extremity has made some desperate enough to utter) into Acknowledgments of God's Care and Goodness towards us, was it not attended with any Prosperity here, must still be one of the greatest Pleasures of the Mind.

SICKNESS, Vexation and Disappointment, with many other unavoidable Accidents, will mix themselves (in Defiance of Mankind) with the most perfect, temporal Prosperity, and in some Degree sour the Relish of our Enjoyments. But *he that considereth the Poor and Needy, the Lord will rescue him in the Time of Trouble, and surely deliver him out of all.*

THE great Pattern of Patience, during the most severe Trial, when there was not a whole Part to be found in his Body, could comfort himself however that he had delivered *the Poor that cry'd unto him; the Fatherless and Him, that had none to help him.* It yielded him now in his Distress no small Degree of Pleasure, that, during the Time of his greatest Affluence, he had shewn Mercy and Compassion, and considered other Mens Conditions as his own.

WE need not enumerate Instances of this Sort recorded in Scripture, the Heathen World (of which I shall mention but one) affording enough for our present Purpose.— The celebrated *Cato*, amongst the antient Romans, could boast of it as the greatest Joy and Strenth of his old Age; and declare that nothing was more pleasing to him than the Conscience of a well-spent Life, and the Remembrance he had of the many Kindnesses he had done to his Fellow-Creatures.

AND indeed when Age shall begin to droop, and the Period of Life draw very nigh; when all past, inordinate Pleasures, shall prove Matter of Torment and Grief to us, and the Flowers of all worldly Glory be withered; when that Earthly Beauty, which we have been so long admiring, shall decay and be converted into Uglinefs and Deformity; the World and the Fashion of it pass away, and Death approach us with an eternal Summons; what a seasonable Comfort will arise from Reflections on our well-conducted Life; how will Death be divested of all it's Terror from this single Consideration, that we have faithfully improved the several Talents, which the Almighty was pleased to commit to our Care? We shall with Confidence take a Prospect of the other World, where we

have provided Bags for ourselves which wax not old, and laid up a Treasure which can never fail us.

THERE our Alms and Offerings will present themselves before us to our unspeakable Satisfaction, and support our Spirits in that Time of Nature's great Distress. Then will the Epicurean find but little Comfort, when he considers how luxuriously he has pampered his lustful Appetite with *That* which should have fed the Bowels of the Hungry. The Monarch will at this Time not be much delighted with his past Grandeur; the Remembrance of his bloody Exploits will be uneasy to him at this unwelcome Hour; and the lamentable Cries of those Orphans and Widows (made so by his Cruelty) will be Musick not at all agreeable to his Ears.

BUT now will the Excellence of Wealth, discreetly made use of in charitable Actions, evidently appear. Every Reflection on the Good a Man has done will administer fresh Delight; and it will be no small Part of his Happiness, that whilst the rest of Mankind have been striving for Superiority in Power and Wealth, he has turn'd his Thoughts upon the Necessities of the Indigent, and readily applied his Treasure to their Relief:
That

That he has cloath'd the Infant from whom he could expect no Return, as he was Incapable of knowing the Obligation; That he has rais'd the Knowledge of Youth, preparing them by those Means for a proper Employment in Life, and so contributed to the publick Good, and that he has promoted the Worship of God, by being instrumental in their pious Education.

THESE proper and charitable Distributions will turn to a much better Account, than if we lived in Possession of all the Treasures of the Earth. The Consciousness of such Actions will give us a noble Resolution to leave this World with Pleasure, and at the great Tribunal our Deeds of Beneficence will be infinitely more ornamental than all the Jewels of the Earth about us. Mercy we shall then remember to be that Attribute of God, in which he seems particularly to delight; our Imitation of which, thro' the Scene of Life, will be rewarded in Heaven *with fulness of Joy, and eternal Pleasure at his right Hand.*

A REMARK or two on the rich Man's Behaviour, who was sorrowful at the Advice in the Text, because he had large Possessions, may serve as a Conclusion to my present Discourse.

HAD

HAD it been possible then for him to have enjoy'd everlasting Happiness without the Loss of his Estate, in all Probability he had been contented; From which Observation we may easily deduce the great Necessity of an entire Resignation of ourselves to the Will of God, in order to fix ourselves in his gracious Favour. The greatest Instance we can possibly give that Religion has a proper Influence on us, and that we are ready to take up the Cross, when required at our Hands, is to practise such Duties as have something in them which opposes any favourite Passion, or at least those Affections which are foolishly inordinate.

To follow the Bent of Inclination in doing what is honest, is no doubt a commendable Action in Man; but to oppose a Desire of committing a Sin is certainly a higher Degree of Virtue. Had that positive Declaration of his been true, which he made, that he had kept the Commandments from his Youth, he would readily have comply'd with the Advice given him, and he would have given to the Poor, because it was doing his Duty to God. With regard to outward Conformity, this Assertion of his might probably be true; but if we put it upon the Footing of perfect Obedience, it was false
and

and insincere beyond all Contradiction. He might be indeed no Murderer, Thief, or Extortioner; He might think he had lived unproveable as to Men, and spent his Life so as to deserve no Reproach from his Fellow-Creatures; but still this outward Conformity and Obedience to the Law (tho' a commendable Thing in itself) was not the Point which he ought to have stop'd at.

SUCH a vain Conceit of his own Worth *Josiah* did not shew, when he heard the Law read unto him; but instead of *all these have I kept from my Youth*, he rent his Cloaths, from an Apprehension he had of God's Wrath being kindled against him, because his Forefathers had neglected the Observation of those Laws; And *David's* Heart (we are satisfied) smote him, for cutting off part of *Saul's* Garment.

LET us make it therefore our Business particularly to enquire whether, amidst all our Pretences to Devotion, an uncharitable Temper does not lurk within us: Whether a meer Pretence to Necessity does not sometimes cover a Meanness of Spirit; and whether a voluntary Submission to present Hardships may not be made without Religion.

If these Things be true, let us turn from
the

the Evil of our Ways, by discarding a base and avaritious Temper as the greatest Enemy to our Happiness in general.

WEALTH without Use, and Prosperity without Application to Advantage, are nothing at all but empty Terms; the Appetite is confined where Avarice bears Sway, and Nature herself is forced to do Penance. Apprehensions of Want, in the midst of Affluence, bespeak a Mind upon the Brink of Despair; so that the Injuries, which the covetous Man does to others by restraining his Wealth, are revenged upon himself by wanting the Enjoyment of it. As his Cruelty to the Needy deserves Correction, so by the Providence of Heaven, no Punishment is more severe than his *own*. Nay his very Desires are generally so malevolent, that rather than do Good, he will not scruple to desire none.

IF this be a desirable Character, then Christianity is odious; and He, who went about doing nothing but Good, may expect from such Slaves no Treatment but what is evil. His holy Religion, by Men of such Principles, will be made to truckle to private Views, and the most generous Instances of Beneficence and Charity, be scandalously ridicul'd as Seminaries of Idleness.

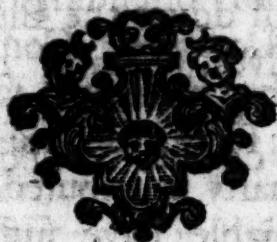
But

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But suffer little Children to come unto me, for of such (says our Blessed Lord) is the Kingdom of Heaven:

LET us therefore not value ourselves upon the Observance of some Precepts, whilst others are neglected and left undone. Let it be our constant Endeavour so to shun the Miser's Blindness, as to avoid running upon the Extravagance of the Prodigal: Not to waste our Substance in foolish and criminal Expences on the one Hand, nor doat upon it with a sordid Baseness on the other; but always to guide these our good Works with Discretion, that they may be neither Encouragements to Idleness nor Motives to Sin. Let us abstain from all Luxury and Excess, and not be so divested of common Humanity, as to suffer a Brother to want the Necessaries of Life, rather than retrench our wicked Extravagancies to feed him. Let us remember that of all Christian Duties this is one of the greatest, enjoin'd us by the Command of a dying Lord, and pressed upon us by his powerful Example: That of all Virtues this is most likely to call down the Blessing of Heaven upon ourselves, Estates and Posterity, seeing God looks upon *That* as done to himself, which we do for the poorest of these our Brethren.

ONE Consideration still remains, I mean their Spiritual Good. To prevent them from falling into Sin, by a proper Application of Instruction to the Ignorant, by giving Comfort and Advice to the Diffident and Scrupulous, with Rebukes and Admonitions to the Obstinate and Impenitent, are noble Instances of our Regard for their Souls. For such Benefactions we shall find our own Felicity hereafter greatly enlarged; what we have done for the Poor is only lent to the Lord, and we shall receive it again with the Advantage of an hundred Fold. In a Word; It will be a delightful Invitation given by our Judge, at that great Day; "Come ye Blessed
" of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for You; because when I was hungry Ye gave me Meat, when thirsty,
" Drink, and when naked, ye cloathed me.
" Verily I say unto You, as ye did it to these my poor and indigent Brethren, Ye did it unto me.



The Expediency and Usefulness of a Christian Ministry.

S E R M O N VII.

GALAT. VI. I.

*Brethren, if a Man be overtaken in a Fault,
Ye, which are Spiritual, restore such a
One in the Spirit of Meekness.*

CENSURE and Detraction are too much
the Voices of human Nature in it's
corrupted Condition. A Mind divested of
Prejudice, undisturb'd by Passion, and un-
corrupt in passing Sentence on Error and
Vice, is the proper Qualification to give
Success to the *Reprover's* Doctrine, and
which, instead of offending the *Reproved*,
does Good like a Medicine. Confidence, with-
out Discretion, has prompted some to assume
the Tribunal; Rewards and Punishments
have been unequally distributed; Qualities in
Themselves amiable have suffered in Cha-
racter,

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rafter, and Innocence itself been rewarded with Condemnation.

THE *Jews*, in the Days of our Saviour, ran too hastily into this Extream; for healing on the Sabbath They accused Him of a Breach of the Law, and at last carried their unrighteous Judgment into the Condemnation and Murder of *Him, who went about doing nothing but Good.*

So necessary is a proper Distinction between *reasonable Reproof* and *uncharitable Censure*, that the Difficulty of judging aright has on the other Hand created a kind of Neutrality in some timorous Persons, and inclined them to an Indifferency in administering the One, lest they should inadvertently be guilty of the Other. So that these Men's Coolness has tended to the Propagation of Error, as much as the Others Baseness did to the Destruction of Innocence.

BUT still the uncomfortable Condition of this Life is Man's Proneness to Mistake: Loss of Innocence, Obscurity of Knowledge, and Defection from Truth, were the sad Effects of his first Offence; and daily Instruction and prudent Reproof, by Divine Appointment, are made the necessary Means to restore him in this his erroneous State.

“ BRETHREN,

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“BRETHREN, if a Man be overtaken in
“a Fault, Ye, which are spiritual, restore
“such a One in the Spirit of Meekness.”

IN discoursing on which Words I shall
enquire,

First, INTO the Expediency and Usefulness of a standing Order of Men to instruct and admonish Mankind in the Pursuit of their Eternal Welfare ;

Secondly, I SHALL endeavour to state the Doctrine, recommended in my Text, by mentioning a few necessary Rules to be observ'd to restore the Erroneous with Success ; and

Lastly, I SHALL make a short Application, not unsuitable, I hope, to the Solemnity of my Subject, nor the Design of our present meeting together.

THE Church Militant has ever met with some publick *Opposers*, as well as secret *Underminers* of her Faith and Doctrine. The earliest Date of Her was pestered with Heresies, which, tho' They differed in the Manner of distressing Her, conspired however to effect her total Destruction. The

Epistles

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Epistles and other Writings of the Fathers, engaged at that Time in her Defence, have recorded very particular but terrifying Accounts of Tenets broached for this Purpose; but for our Comfort, they have handed down to us likewise the proper Antidotes which those Champions prepared against the Poison of her Enemies.

WITHOUT taking Notice of what Vexation and Trouble the *Manichees* gave St. *Austin* concerning the Trinity, and their Denial of the Books of the Old Testament; the Tenets of the *Donatists* against the Coequality of the Son with the Father, and the Holy Ghost with the Son; St. *Jerome's* Pains to silence the *Pelagians*, and St. *Crisostome's* Care to defeat the *Montanists* and other raging Sects of his Days, it may easily be conjectured what a State the Church had been reduced to, had there been no such Heroes to stem the Torrent of Heresy, or to contend for the Faith once delivered to the Saints. The whole Christian World had inevitably sunk in the *Arrian* Deluge, had not *Athanasius* the Great stood in the Gap, and turn'd the Stream upon the Heads of his Enemies.

UNWILLING that his Church should be thus trampled under Foot; that the wild
Boar

Sermon the Seventh. 127

Boar out of the Wood, or the wild Beast of the Field should devour it, God was pleased in his Wisdom to appoint "some Apostles, some Prophets and Teachers, for the perfecting of the Saints, for the Work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ." Men! who (in the Words of the sublime Prophet) have the Spirit of the Lord upon them, to preach good Tidings to the Meek, to bind up the Broken-hearted, and to comfort those that mourn. Persons! who have secluded themselves from all other Business to study and explain the Word of God: Who take Pleasure in removing the Doubts of the Unsettled, in solving the Difficulties occurring to the Ignorant, and in setting forward the Salvation of all Men."

THE Weakness of Human Nature is too great not to stand in need of Assistance. The Unsteadiness of our Attention to any Thing good; the Imperfection of our Resolutions, and the violent Influence given by the Impression of sensible Objects, these jointly conspire to set aside Reason, and daily hurry us into wild Disorder and Confusion. In such Circumstances the Pleasures of Sense become too prevalent, and spiritual Entertainments find a cold Reception. From a Corruption of Birth the Mind is too much alienated

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alienated from earnestly longing after Truth, and therefore, without some kind Advice to steer it aright, we can have but little Hopes of it's ever attaining to divine Knowledge, the most difficult, because the least admired of any Understanding in Life.

NATURAL Inclinations, where there is no Instruction, carry but very few into common *speculative* Knowledge. Practical Amusements; impertinent, frivolous and empty Conversation, added to idle and blasphemous Discourse, generally prevail as the most engaging Entertainments of this World.

THE Practice of Religion is decry'd even now, by some modern Unbelievers, as quite unnecessary; and were there no "*Pastors*" "*to feed Men with Knowledge and Understanding*"; was there no *Balm in Gilead*, "*no Physician there*," how would the Health of this People be recovered? Infidelity, like *David's* Pestilence, would rage at Noon-Day; unthinking Youth would greedily swallow the Poison, and Lewdness and Debauchery be cultivated as publick Benefits. The Impressions of Natural Religion would soon be obliterated; all Sense of Shame and Apprehension of Punishment would be derided as Degeneracy and Cowardice, and publick Licentiousness would give Birth to open, undisguised Atheism.

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Is it not therefore expedient and useful that there should be an Order of Men amongst us, who make it their sole Employment to effect the difficult Task of promoting spiritual Good? Who by their Instruction nourish the Weak, encourage Integrity, and inculcate such Truths, as will restore and preserve uncorrupt Religion? Who study to enlighten Men's Minds; to reform Them in their mistaken Pursuits, by directing them to embrace what is their real Good, and to avoid that which will be injurious to them! Persons! who desecrate no Time in unnecessary or idle Speculations; who by their Pens *defend* Religion, and by their Practice *recommend* it. Whose Conduct bespeaks the Possibility and Excellency of what They teach; and whose Virtues are a Reproach to the Tenets and Lives of Those who would sap the Foundation of Christianity.

Thus beautiful are the Feet of Those who preach Salvation to Mankind; who are appointed as Overseers to guard the Flock of Christ, lest their Simplicity should become a Prey to ravenous Wolves, or They should be carried away with every Wind of false Doctrine, by Men who continually lye in Wait to deceive.

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THE Priesthood was held by the antient Christians in the greatest Esteem; the Sacerdotal Honour was not unjustly compared with the Regal Dignity; and the Encomiums bestowed on it superseded any Proof whatever of its Expediency and Usefulness. Neither will the present Dispensers of God's Word and Sacraments too much magnify their Office, if (in the Words of *Moses* to the Sons of *Levi*) "They count it no small
" Thing that the God of *Israel* hath se-
" parated Them from the Congregation of
" *Israel* to bring them near to Himself,
" and to do the Service of the Tabernacle of
" the Lord."

AND happy is it for Mankind that God has taken so much Care of his Church, that He daily raises up Men of Knowledge to protect her against all the Attempts of Infidelity and Enthusiasm. Vice is of an insinuating and subtle Nature; A single Member is no sooner corrupted, but it's Venom swiftly affects the whole Body. Religion being once made the Subject of Obloquy, Virtue in general will be the destin'd Sacrifice: And were there no Persons appointed to guard against so fatal a Disorder, Corruption would soon become universal; Bodily Temper would be our unhappy Guide;
Passion

Sermon the Seventh. 131

Passion would sit at the Helm, and, without any Anchor to stop our Progress, we should sail at Random, and be quickly run upon some Rock or Quicksand. Tully's Reflection would be very pertinent and true—
“*Haud scio an Pietate erga Deos sublatâ,*
“*Fides etiam, et Societas humani Gene-*
“*ris, et una excellentissima Virtus Justi-*
“*tia tollatur.*” Take away but Piety, and we shall have but little Hopes that Justice itself would continue in Being, that Faith would be secure or that human Society could be maintained. Universal Libertinism would be the reigning Doctrine; the Whispers of Conscience would be drowned in the Noise of Debauchery, and Mens Souls would be lost for want of proper and necessary Restraints.

THE Expediency therefore and Usefulness of the Clergy can be questioned by no serious Person, when He considers that by this Means God has provided for the Relief of scrupulous Minds; for the Satisfaction of Consciences perplexed and melancholy, and for the Explication of Scripture to the Illiterate and Ignorant. Persons who are well disposed may not have Capacity enough of themselves to form proper Judgments of many Points respecting their Eternal Welfare; Others may want Leisure maturely to

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deliberate as some Difficulties may require, or they may be too partial in their own Cause to direct their Consciences aright in many particular Cases relating to their Happiness.

THESE Things but well digested, serious Persons must applaud the *Winners of Souls as wise*, and the Abuse of the Ludicrous, the Debauched and Profligate, instead of sullyng, by Contrast will add a Lustre to their Virtues. The Religion They teach, prohibits all Quarrels and Unchristian Contention; it recommends Humility, Beneficence and Good Nature, and chastises every Thing which may tend to interrupt our real Good.

IN short; a serious Recommendation of the Doctrines of Christianity; a vigorous Defence of them from heretical, or other Innovations, and a prudent and seasonable Reproof of Vice and Immorality, must necessarily be attended with Use and Advantage. Religion, as it is the grand Topick of the World, about which Mankind in general are very sollicitous, must sometimes raise a Conflict even in it's Enemies Breasts, and must influence them, in their Intervals, to think that *They*, as well as Others, ought to be concerned about it. Discourses upon
Death

Sermon the Seventh. 133

Death and Judgment will create some Misgivings of Heart; They cannot always father such Reflections on a melancholy Disposition; some Suspicion will arise, in Defiance of all their Efforts, that there may be some better Grounds for Religion, when They see it so zealously inculcated, and so strictly observed by Men remarkable for their Education, their Learning, and Piety. No Jealousy can be entertained of such Men's Sincerity; who shew that they are persuaded of the Terrors of the Lord, when thus by Life and Doctrine they endeavour to persuade Others. The Wicked by Degrees may thus be converted from the Error of his Ways; may at last believe Religion to be reasonable in itself as well as it's Principles, and in its Effects momentous and important.

UPON the whole; was it (as some of it's Enemies have suggested it to be) nothing more than a politick Scheme, invented to assist Reason in some of it's Intricacies, or contrived to preserve Peace amongst Men in their Social Life, yet as long as it's Doctrines were so excellent, and the Duties enjoined by it so beneficial; as long as the Teachers of it by their Lives prov'd the Goodness of the Cause, and that all Comfort must be lost as soon as This is overturned,
none

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none but a brutish Temper could possibly conspire against it's Welfare; None but a Nero could rejoice to see it in Flames.

So that not only the Excellency of those Doctrines taught by the Clergy, their Christian Admonition and seasonable Reproof; Their constant Vigilance to oppose the Usurpation of Iniquity, and to stem the Tide of destructive Error; Their assiduous Diligence to keep off Seducers, and their Readiness to direct every one in the Path of Salvation, not only these Things, I say, but the sad Effects which would attend the Want of them, enough bespeak their Expediency and Usefulness.

Thus much having been advanced upon the First Thing to be enquired into, I proceed to state the Doctrine of my Text, by pointing out a few Cautions to be observed, which, I hope, will contribute to the restoring the Erroneous with Success. And this was the

Second THING proposed to be done,

SINS are of a very different Complexion, and their Penalty will be adjusted according to their Nature and Circumstances: One Caution therefore to be observed, in order
to

Sermon the Seventh. 135

to reform successfully, will be nicely to distinguish between the Nature of Offences, and to apply our Medicine as the Malady shall require.

SINS of Infirmary are not to be treated like those of Presumption. Ignorance of some particular Actions and Duties, concerning which a Man may not have Understanding enough to form proper Resolutions what to do, or else may not know what is most eligible in itself, or most acceptable to God, may occasion him to trip in Point of Duty; but he is to be recalled from such Error by easy and gentle Means, by Christian Exhortation, rather than severe Reproof.

So likewise when He is overtaken in a Fault, thro' Surprize; When a Temptation assaults him so suddenly and unexpected, that the Spirit has no Time to reflect on the Effects of Compliance, nor Leisure to represent the Persuasives or Terrors, inclining him to, or deterring him from it; This must come under the Notion of Infirmary, and be entitled to that easy Treatment recommended in the Text.—For it is observeable that the *Understanding* moves the *Will*, not as a *Natural* but as a *Rational* Agent: I mean, it has not an absolute Power over it to say go, and it goeth; as if the Order of the

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One must necessarily be obeyed by the Other; but only that when the Carnal Appetites have been busy in seducing the Will, the Understanding then interposes, dissuades from Compliance, and by Argument inclines it to abstain from sensual Practices.

THE Case is not much different when a Person is betray'd thro' Excess of Passion. I don't intimate that Passion will ever justify the Commission of any Sin; but only that when Anger or Fear, Joy or Sorrow, upon some emergent Occasion, becomes inordinate and violent, provided a Man studies himself so carefully as to discover which of These He is most prone to, and labours sincerely against all, then, I think, some few Acts of his immoderate Passion may have some little Title to the Excuse of Weakness.

FOR notwithstanding, in the Strictness of the Letter, the least Sin is not to be committed to promote the greatest Good, and tho' deliberate Resolution to offend changes the Scene, and makes That a Sin of Wilfulness, which had been otherwise one of Infirmary, yet abstracted from This, and considered as the Effect of sudden Surprise, a Person may be said to fall thro' the Hastiness of Temptation, working in his Natural Infirmary; properly to be overtaken,
and

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and therefore to be restored in the Spirit of Meekness.

BUT He, who sins wilfully against the Convictions of Conscience and the Illuminations of Grace, offends of malicious Wickedness, against the Demonstrations of Duty and with a harden'd Presumption. His Offence is crying and enormous, and wants Nothing to aggravate his Crime or add to his Condemnation. A Plea of Ignorance, amidst so much Light, will be ineffectual, and his Crime can never be imputed to Frailty, till he can prove a fatal Necessity for it.

THE Almighty has shewn unto Man what is good and profitable for him; has prescribed Means, by which He might have known and done better, whereby He might have awaken'd his *Understanding* and fortify'd his *Will*, and have render'd the Temptation of no Effect.—After such Assistances given him, should Neglect or Confidence, Spiritual Pride or Security prompt him to make no Manner of Use of them, his Sin will be of a presumptive Nature, what He knowingly commits against the Light of Reason and Dictates of Conscience.

THUS when the Lunatick in the Gospel

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was

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was brought to the Disciples, and they could not cast out the evil Spirit, our Blessed Lord in his Answer charges them with almost insufferable Infidelity. "Oh! *faithless* Generation (says he) how long shall I be with You, and suffer You?" Their Neglect of the Means given to enable them to do it, was the real Occasion of their Incapacity. And it is observable, from the Term *Faithless* being made Use of, that wilful Sin is not That only which is committed against natural Conscience and spiritual Infusion, but That likewise which is particularly committed against *Faith*, or through a Neglect of those Means which God, in his revealed Will, has been pleased to prescribe for our Observance. Such Offences as these require a more severe Chastisement, and it will be culpable in Us to let them slip uncorrected.

BUT in order to render our Reproofs effectual, it will be necessary for us to be very circumspect in some particular Points relating to the Administration of them. In many Cases an immediate Chastisement creates *Provocation* rather than *Amendment*; and instead of correcting the Sinner, exasperates him to prosecute more notorious Evils. The besotted Wretch, amidst the Heat of Intemperance, would be incapable of Conviction; and Abuse, instead of Gratitude, would be the

the Reward of our unseasonable Kindness. And it would be the very same with the Cholerick in his Rage; we should feed the Flame by endeavouring to extinguish his Anger, add one Passion to another till it terminated in a double Madness. Our Silence in such Instances would be infinitely more seasonable, and a prudent Delay would neither weaken the Cause, nor justify the Offence, but would be more successful in the Sinners Reformation.

IN some particular Cases, the Nature of the Crime requires an immediate Correction; the Conviction becomes the more sensibly powerful, and prevents the Opportunity either of softning it with an Excuse, or positively contradicting the Matter of Fact.

THUS our Blessed Lord, by Way of corrective Remembrance, cast his Eye upon St. Peter at the Crowing of the Cock, which touched the Heart of the relenting Apostle with so warm a Feeling of his treacherous Denyal, that it had it's Effect; He went out and wept bitterly.

A WOUND is not cured by being too much exposed to publick Air; further Caution, therefore, relating to *Place* as well as *Time*, appears necessary; and the Spirit of Meek-

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ness might restore the Erroneous, when an open Declamation might never reclaim him.

WHEN a Man is once made the Object of publick Ridicule, he fancies his Character sunk into Disgrace, and He becomes very careless of his future Conduct. Invincible Obstinacy follows this Indolence; he indulges every unwarrantable Desire, and from an improper Correction of one Fault, he becomes guilty of a Thousand more. Be his Actions ever so base, or his Life nothing but one Scene of Debauchery, his Reputation (he is satisfy'd) cannot be worse, at least Recovery is what he despairs of.

SENSE of Shame and Apprehension of Disgrace (thro' a kind of inherent Modesty in human Nature) are very prevalent in restraining Men from any immoral Actions. Advice therefore apply'd with a becoming Regard for the Good of their Characters, and securing their Credit, proposes a double Advantage towards gaining an easy Reception: And nothing can make a more lasting Impression, than such undoubted Testimony of Love in promoting temporal and eternal Good.

Is it fit to say to a King, Thou art wicked, or to Princes Ye are ungodly? This Question

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tion may remind Us that *Distinction* is another necessary Caution to be regarded in order to give an Edge to our Admonitions. When the Prophet was sent by God himself to reprove *David* for his Adultery and Murder, the Sense of a Divine Commission could not induce him to lay aside the Maxims of Prudence; *Nathan* wisely consulted every Method how to execute it with Success; He did not rudely tell the Prince directly of his Sins, but discreetly treated him as one invested with Regal Power; in a modest and submissive Manner related his Parable, and gain'd the consenting Resentment of *David's* Mind, before He came to the Application of *Thou art the Man*. And Circumspection enough may be learnt from this Instance for our Direction in Cases of a like Nature,

It is the Duty of every Christian gratefully to receive the Word of Exhortation, let it proceed from what Mouth it will.—But nothing will give more Weight to our Arguments than a regular, honest and good Life. If We are obnoxious Ourselves, we shall have but a poor Prospect of the Amendment of Others: A favourite Vice is no sooner assaulted, but Resentment pushes it's Admirer upon recriminating in Kind; and the pulling a Mote from a Brother's Eye, may cause a Discovery of a Beam in our own;

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Or at least without first pulling the Beam out of our own, We shall not see clear enough to take the Mote out of our Brother's.

INTEGRITY therefore and Uprightness are necessary Qualifications; and Example has generally more Influence than Doctrine. Advice from an honest Man will never be suspected of Insincerity. His Reputation and Character will allure, or rather command our Attention; and his Words will work so forcibly upon the Imagination, that they will influence our Practice, when They were intended only to win our Love.—So essentially necessary is a good Life to make Reproof successful, that Exhortation, without it, will be rather a Spur to the Offender than any Inducement to him to abstain from the Commission of Sin.

To rebuke therefore without Offence, and to convince without Affront, will, I hope, necessarily follow a due Observance of the Qualifications I have hinted at in this Discourse.

BUT should all these Means prove sometimes ineffectual; should the kind Word of Admonition grate upon a deaf Ear; should all proper Seasons have been embraced for Instruc-

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Instruction, and the unfortunate Sinner still remain unmov'd, obstinate and incorrigible, they who are spiritual have but this Method to take; to break off all familiar Conversation with him, and to deny him any Intimacy with them at all. This may prove a Motive to his Shame, and be the Occasion of his Repentance: It will be a seasonable Restraint laid upon the Crime, and is a Duty incumbent on Us, as Christians. For if He neglect to hear *Thee*, thy Witnesses and the Church, let him be unto thee as a Heathen Man and a Publican.

It will be a prudent Step taken by us however not to separate from him upon Pique or Displeasure; to avoid all fastidious Passion towards him; to lay aside Haughtiness, Pride and Contempt, and still continue to think him the greater Object of our Pity, as He is unhappily become the more incorrigible Sinner.—The Advice of the Apostle in this Case may serve for our Direction—*Warn them that are unruly; comfort the feeble-Minded; support the Weak; be patient toward all Men.*

A SHORT Application of what has been offered, was what I proposed as a Conclusion of this Discourse.

It

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It appears expedient and useful for Mankind that there should be a standing Order of Men to instruct and admonish them in the Pursuit of their Eternal Welfare ; It is an easy Inference therefore that *Respect*, at least, is due to the sacred Order, from the People in a Christian Community, from the Value of Mens Souls with which they are entrusted, and from the excellent Endowments required, amply to discharge the Duties of their Ministry.

It will be an Aggravation of the Crime of those low, trifling *Wits*, who are unacquainted with the Beauty of Holiness, and who ridicule it because destructive of their Beastly Entertainments. Virtue is too refin'd for such groveling Tastes ; and unreasonable Opposition makes it the more amiable to Men of Sense. Let us not be surprized therefore, if common Contempt should attend us from this Quarter ; They, who deride our *Faith*, or question our *Doctrine*, cannot be expected to have any Veneration for *Us* in our Sacerdotal Characters, and if thro' a sneaking Dejection we should encourage their Audacity, we should betray an abject Cowardice ; encourage publick Abuse, and anticipate imminent Contempt.——A meanness of Soul This ! thus to ebb and flow with the

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the Vicissitudes of Fortune ; what bespeaks an Ignorance of the Value of our Vocation, and betrays the Religion of Jesus, in order to shew a Servility to a degenerate Age.

BUT this Charge, I hope, will never be imputed to any of Us. There is a Possibility for a prudent Person, by a manly Behaviour, to avoid Contempt ; but should it fall to his Share for doing Good, Blessed are They who suffer for Righteousness Sake. Let us take Care therefore to *merit* Respect, and They will be culpable, who do not give it us.

IN short : Were Men as solicitous about their Eternal Welfare, as They are concerned for their Temporal Good, there would be no unjust Murmurings against their spiritual Guides ; no Art made Use of to defraud or circumvent them, and Natural Equity would suggest to every one sufficient Arguments for *Regard*, as well as a *competent Subsistence* in Life.

BUT *Lastly*,

SHOULD our best Endeavours not meet with their wish'd-for Effect ; should our Vigilance and Circumspection find no favourable Entertainment, and our Christian

T

Advice

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Advice create no Amendment at all, This however will be our Comfort and Satisfaction, that We have discharged a Duty agreeable to our Maker's Will ; that They, who are thus faithful unto Death, shall obtain a Crown of Life ; rejoyce here, and be rewarded hereafter.

BUT should our Labours meet with a happy Issue ; should we fortunately restore the Erroneous, and turn many unto Righteousness ; should we be the happy Instruments in discountenancing Prophaneness, and promoting the Honour of the Christian Religion, our Labours will not be in vain in the Lord, but after Death We shall shine like the Stars for ever.—This can never be thought a disagreeable Employment, as long as We know it to be a necessary Duty.

IN a Word : Let us apply our Medicine in the most tender Manner, where the Malady requires such an Application ; and when a Case calls for more corrosive Means, We are to remember that We are embarked in the Cause of our God, and are not to be afraid (with Prudence) to reprove the Vices of Men.

PRIDE an Enemy to SOCIETY
and RELIGION.

S E R M O N VIII.

PROVERBS xxix. 23.

*A Man's Pride shall bring him low; But
Honour shall uphold the humble in Spirit.*

Humility of Spirit is an Expression capable of very different Constructions, and in one Sense might make *That* a very low Observation, which, properly distinguished, will appear worthy its Author. If We consider it as arising from an Indigency of Circumstances, and that a Man, from the Consideration of his Incapacity of supporting a haughty Behaviour, should therefore demean Himself in an humble and decent Manner, This, I think, would give but little Weight to the Reflection; because an Alteration of Fortune would give a Turn to his Method of Thinking; and being rais'd

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from Humility of *Life*, We should find his Humility of *Spirit* in a different Dress upon the Change of the Scene.

MEER Poverty can never with any Propriety be stiled a Virtue: 'Tis a Condition which scarce any Man living would make Choice of; it is often the Offspring of Idleness, or the Product of Profuseness; and it is evident that neither Reason nor Scripture will ever justify or approve of what is entirely owing to a Person's Negligence or Extravagancy.

'Tis not a Meanness therefore of Condition, or running into a Monkish voluntary State of Beggary, that can entitle a Man to any Honour or Merit whatever. To be miserable and necessitous upon Choice, calls for *Condemnation* rather than *Pity*, and the Christian Scheme encourages Industry and Diligence in our respective Callings, to which God is pleased frequently to add the Blessing of a temporal Reward.

BUT He, who is truly of an *humble Spirit*, regards the Condition of his Mind; considers the Imperfection of his *Intellectual* as well as *Moral* Attainments; is not elated in Prosperity, nor dejected if an Adverse Fortune falls to his Share, but maintains a steady,

dy, uniform Submission to the Divine Will, and shews a happy Contentment, let his Lot fall in what Ground it pleases. His Heart is not wrought upon by meer Compulsion, but He is ready to resign Himself up to his Maker without any Reluctance, and, amidst the warmest Circumstances, is an utter Stranger to Vanity or Ostentation. He says to Corruption, "Thou art my Father, and to the Worm, Thou art my Mother," considers that He was shapen in Sin, and conceived in Iniquity,

HONOUR, in its best Acceptation, is due to a Man of so lovely a Disposition; He is blessed with the Ornament of a meek and humble Spirit, which will entitle Him to the Favour both of God and Man. Whilst a haughty Behaviour is an Insult upon our Natural Notions of human Weakness, and demands the Contempt and Loathing of Mankind.

"A MAN'S Pride shall bring him low;
"But Honour shall uphold the Humble in
"Spirit."

THERE are two Assertions in my Text, either of which are expressive of, or points out to us the Meaning of both. Pride, considered as a disagreeable Quality, creates

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a Man many Enemies, and degrades or brings him low in the Opinion of Mankind; whilst Humility, on the contrary, acquires that Honour which it declines, and naturally claims the Esteem of all Men.

THE Truth of this I shall enquire into, and endeavour to ratify, by considering Man, in the

First PLACE as a Social Creature, or a Member of human Society; and

Secondly, As it has carried him into fundamental Errors in Point of Religion.

IN the First Place then, Man, considered as a Social Creature, will acquire no Esteem by a haughty or arrogant Behaviour.

THE Passion itself is of so odious a Nature, that there is not one solid Argument to be produc'd in its Defence; and it is generally observable that the very Persons addicted to it (thro' an unaccountable Ignorance of their own Condition) are most apt in Discourse to rally and condemn it. An unwelcome Disappointment generally attends an Expectation of Homage, founded on a great Opinion of Ourselves. The World for the most Part judge very pertinently that

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that a conceited Person is but a Fool in the Dress of Understanding; a Garment which will never fit easy on *Any* but Men of Sense, and will recommend even a *Fool* to *None* but Persons of the same Complexion.

BLIND to his own Demerit, no one can be Master of any extraordinary Knowledge: A false Conceit renders Instruction useless, and under so fatal a Captivity, a Man may be *Wealthy* and *Vain*, but He will never deserve the Character of Honour or Wisdom. An ignorant Person, who has any Sense of his being so, is capable of Amendment, but a *conceited Fool* has no other Prospect than that of always being One. And when once it is discovered that he is a Stranger to his own Folly, it will be determined that he can be no great Adept in any Science whatever. Pretences therefore, where there is no real Merit, will entitle him to no One's Favour, but his *Own*: He may be pleased with the Suggestions of his own wild Fancy, and give Credit to the Delusions of his Imagination, till no One will credit what He desires should be believed of Him.

HUMAN Reason is too often misled by our corrupt and erring Affections; and when once that Guide of Life is perverted, and We become fond of our Mistake, 'twill be no Wonder

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Wonder at all if We are made the Sport of private Censure, or the Subject of publick Contempt. We shall have nothing to screen us from the Ridicule of the World; We must be guilty of great Presumption if We even *hope* to gain the *Esteem* of Men by it; and if We escape their *Derision*, We may value Ourselves upon our *Fortune* more than our *Merit*.

LET our Stations in Life be ever so great, or our Circumstances ever so happy, nothing will justify this vain Passion; the Nature of our Possessions will bespeak their Inconstancy; an elevated Situation often terminates in a Fall, and *He who to Day is a King, to Morrow may die. Why then is Earth and Ashes proud?* Even in the midst of Affluence, we are very far from Felicity: The Want of that Power, which we have not, must damp our Satisfaction: All our outward Grandeur will avail us nothing, if there be but one *Mordecai* left, who refuses to gratify our boundless Ambition, and to pay Us that Respect which our Pride calls for.

WHAT a bad Foundation *Wealth* is for a Building of this Kind, the daily Miscarriages of Those, who sink from it, are Arguments too close and convicting to be overlook'd: And as for Posts of Honour and Places

Places of Preferment (which every trifling Seeker has Vanity enough to think Himself qualified for) these frequently expire before the Possessors of them; and then the Support of Haughtiness proves like the brittle Reed of Egypt, and breaks under every One, who leans thereon.

Upon Changes of this Nature every Breath will be ready to blast the Degraded's Fame: Tyranny, during his Power, will be repaid with ample Interest, and for pretending to be more than He really was, His Pride will bring him low, and make Him the Sport even of the Vulgar and Abject. The fawning Sy-cophant, who lately flattered him and blew up the Coals of his Vanity, even That timeing Slave will forsake him upon his Downfall, and adapt his Tone to the Accents of his new Master's Inclinations. Nay rather than be quite excluded Business, He will play his Game at all Hazards, and rally the Foibles of his old Friend in Disgrace, in Order to please his new One in Power.

DISAGREEABLE Reflections must necessarily arise from such Insults, and tend to ruffle and discompose his Mind, and the Incapacity of his present Situation, to punish such Petulance, must add some Acuteness to that Sore

Sore which before serv'd to fret and make him uneasy.

AN Opinion built upon the Strength of human Reason, or the Attainments of human Learning is a presumptive and false Confidence; a Fabrick rais'd upon the Sand, whose tottering Nature will appear upon the first Assault of any Tempest. The most Learned and Knowing are frequently catch'd in Error and Mistake; their Opinions concerning natural Things are generally so clashing and inconsistent, that They seem to swim in a Sea of Uncertainty, ebbing and flowing just as Storms shall happen to toss them.

THE Knowledge of the most Inquisitive is very shallow and unextended; the Trifles, which we pretend to know, are known with Uncertainty, and the deepest Proficiency made in any Point of Science (instead of encouraging our Pride) might be made a Glass to discover our Ignorance; shew us how little we should confide in our own Judgments, much less be conceited with our own Weakness.

BUT Pride, considered as the genuine Offspring of Folly; a Presumption of Wisdom, and consequently an Ignorance of Human

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man Defects, is a deplorable Circumstance, when nourished by Persons in any eminent Situation, and Society itself must be wounded by it's Malignity. A Man without Understanding must make a pitiful Figure in a publick Capacity; and yet Conceit has such a fatal Influence as to put every *weak Head* in Quest of Promotion, which has not Sense enough to discover its own Incapacity.

WHAT Detriment may not the Concerns of any Community meet with, or rather what Difficulties can They possibly be exempted from, when Vanity and Indiscretion sit at the Helm, and there is neither Counsel, Wisdom, nor Understanding to steer them? Vain Glory is well known to be a catching and infectious Distemper: The Members of any Society are too apt to mimic their Head, and (like Children) to imitate the Foibles of their Parents, till they grow into too close a Copy of their Deformity.

THE Scale of Justice must be a very uneven Ballance, when the Hand which should hold it is thus cramp'd with Passion, Sincerity and Truth will find no Admittance, when the Ear is shut against both by De-
lusion, and Actions, in themselves base and unjustifiable, will be greedily undertaken,

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ken, when They tend to gratify Vanity and Revenge.

PROCEEDINGS of this Nature must be attended with bad Effects; The Community will be involved in inextricable Difficulties, thro' the perverse Folly of a conceited Governor, and must in the End suffer, in it's Character and publick Weal, which a *wise* and *honest* Director would have consulted as much as his own private Good.

WHEN the Infection of Pride grows thus universal, and the Sluces of Instruction are closely pent up, Errors of Consequence will be espous'd and persisted in; and as *Conceit* has taken Possession, of the Seat, of *Reason*, so *Folly* will be admired as the truest *Wisdom*. Fancy will carry Men into Delusion and Insecurity; they will tread the Wheel of Stupidity and Perverseness, till They become a *Hissing and By-Word*; a *Proverb of Scorn*, of *Derision and Reproach*.

HUMILITY on the contrary is a very engaging and ornamental Virtue: It makes a Man shine in the meanest Circumstances, and has Power to prevail even with God and Man. Persons thus happily disposed never attribute to Themselves any Excellency which They have not; neither do They over-rate

That

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That which They have, but ascribe the Glory of it to God it's Author.

Their modest Deportment is not false, or merely external; They are in Reality what their Appearance shews them to be, and their Humility is the genuine Virtue of their Minds. Mankind will naturally reverence Them for so amiable a Conduct, and think them worthy the greatest Honour, for thinking Them selves worthy of none.

No Envy distracts their Minds; their Thoughts are not disturb'd with Ambition or Revenge, but they are sedate and contented amidst all the Change and Inconstancy of Life. If their Conditions are low, They endeavour honestly to make them comfortable; and if plentiful or abounding, They take Care to stifle all Arrogance and Conceit, and give God the Honour due to him for such Blessings.

If They are appointed to act in any eminent Sphere, a previous Circumspection guards them against the common Temptations of Greatness: They consider that none are fit to govern Others, who can't maintain the Government of Themselves, and that little or no Respect will be paid to that Office, which is filled with Ignorance, Intult, and Tyranny.

PROPER

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PROPER Thoughts on the Perfection of God discover to Man his own Imperfection; and He can never be led aside by a fond Opinion of his own Worth, who has been so prudently instructed that he has no Title to any. Pride He considers as an Enemy to Society in general; a Temptation to despise that Help, which is necessary to make Man truly wise; and tho' it may be only a ridiculous Passion in Persons of lower Life, yet (as acting in a publick Capacity) in Himself, he knows, it must be an injurious One. He is satisfy'd that every Species of it is an Abomination to the Lord; and that *He who exalteth Himself* in any other manner, than by pursuing the Perfection of his Nature, *shall surely be abased.*

BUT I need dwell no longer upon the Folly of it in Man, considered as a social Creature, since it's Infection has spread farther, and carried him into fundamental Errors in Point of Religion; which was the other

THING I propos'd considering.

Many of these Errors cannot come under Consideration at this Time; after a few Reflections on One or Two of them, I shall

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hasten to the Conclusion of the Subject I am upon,

ALL those indecent Discourses then, concerning the Nature and Attributes of God, in which Men dare to contradict what He has reveal'd of himself in the Scriptures, and even what the Suggestions of Natural Reason point out to us, generally spring from the same Root of Pride; which will not suffer us to submit our Understandings to the Revelations of infinite Wisdom, nor bend our stubborn Wills to the Authority of Heaven itself.

Thus many of the Espousers of the Socinian Cause have endeavour'd to depreciate the Merits of our Saviour's Satisfaction, by raising Objections against his Divinity: And the Argument no doubt would prevail, could it possibly be supported; and the Sacrifice would not have been of that infinite Worth, necessary to have satisfy'd infinite Justice, had He not been God as well as Man.— But till this is prov'd, the Attonement is compleat, and those Texts of Scripture, upon which the Satisfaction is founded, explicit and unanswerable. The Word *av'ro*, for which the Son of Man came to give his Life, signifies, and might have been translated in St. Matthew's Gospel, *The Price of Redemption*.—I only mention This to shew

that

that Christ hath obtained Eternal Redemption for us, not *without* any Satisfaction, but We are bought with a Price, or as St. Paul has it, in the Acts of the Apostles, God hath purchased his Church with his own Blood.

BUT the Perspicuity of Scripture, in Behalf of this great Atonement, is eluded by the most ignorant Reply that possibly could be thought of; and those Texts which set it forth in the most expressive and positive manner, are term'd Expressions in themselves improper.

AN Elusion this! that scarce deserves a Reply; and as well might They have said that We are *improperly redeemed*, and that We shall be *improperly saved*, because no Flesh can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, if the Justice of God be not *properly* and perfectly satisfy'd.

THE Temporal Death of Adam was not the only Punishment due to his Offence; the Divine Justice was not satisfy'd by so pitiful an Atonement, notwithstanding these *Opinionists* contend that this was so full a Satisfaction, as to render That of Christ altogether Needless, and that God in Equity could require no more.

HAD

HAD the Death of the Body been a sufficient expiatory Sacrifice for the Soul, the Threatning denounced upon it need not have been a Kind of re-iterated Expression, as *Thou shalt die the Death*: It had been enough to have said, *Thou shalt die for thy Offence*, without adding to it *Thou shalt die The Death*.

THE best of our Commentators have taken particular Notice of this, and have agreed in their Interpretations that the *additional Words* imply the Death of the Soul added to that of the Body: That as the Soul had a Share in the Offence, it should likewise partake of the Penalty due to it; that a Temporal Death only had been a partial Sentence; and that the Soul, which had been most guilty, (considered as the Spring of all Bodily Action) being immortal, must thus have gone unpunished.

I SHALL wave citing what has been extracted upon this Text from the *Jewish Rabbins*; what is recorded in *Athanasius*, upon the Incarnation of Christ, and in several who have judiciously commented on the Place; but must observe that They have all unanimously agreed upon a *Spiritual* as well as *Temporal* Death, that the Perdition of the Soul

as well as *Body* is imply'd in the Sentence, and that as both had *sinned*, so both was to be *punished*. Otherwise at the Resurrection the Punishment of Sin had finally ended, and an Eternal Punishment must have ensued, unless we allow, that the Wicked as well as the Good, shall be equally and eternally happy, as both of them will be raised again and exist to all Eternity.

'Tis strange how far Arrogance will carry the Enquiries of weak human Reason. The *Socinian* not contented with unanswerable Replies, raises fresh Objections against our Saviour's Divinity; calls in Question the Union of the two Natures, and concludes that because He died as a Man, He could not therefore possibly be God.

LORD what is Man that He should hope to unravel the Mysteries of Heaven! That the gracious Proceedings of God for his Good, should be thus presumptuously repaid with Ingratitude, and that his Pride should expose the Weakness of his Reason, by it's vain Attempts to accomplish That which is beyond it's Reach.

THE Preservation of Christ's *Human Nature* from Mortality was within the Verge of his *Divine Power*: He could as easily have

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have made *That* Nature immortal, as without Sustenance, have kept his Body forty Days from Starving. He rais'd his own Body from the Grave, and could have prevented it's ever falling into that Condition; But how then had the Scriptures been fulfilled that thus it must be? It had been utterly inconsistent with his Divine Will, as well as the great Design of his Incarnation, and the expiatory Sacrifice for the Sins of Mankind, had been as imperfect as these vain Babblers would now have it be.

LET them but consider the Composition of Themselves, and the present Objection falls to the Ground. The Body of every Man living is mortal, whilst the Soul is of a quite different Nature: What Ingratitude is it therefore, that our Blessed Lord (considered as constituted of two different Natures) should be in Person mortal in one Capacity, and immortal in the other?—All that expired upon the Cross was nothing but what he took upon him in the Womb of the Virgin, which was not the *Person*, but the *Nature* of Man.

THE Personal Union of the *Divine* and *Human* Natures were not broken; there was a Separation indeed of the *Spirit* and the *Flesh*, but neither of them was separated

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from his Divinity. The Rays of Comfort, darting from this, were a little Time withdrawn; His *Human Nature* alone bore the Struggles and Conflict of Death, but the personal Union (as I observed before) was, and remained ever inseparable.

I SHALL follow these Reasoners no farther at present, but conclude this Head with *St. Austin's* Observation in his Book of the Trinity, "*Immature & perversa Rationis Aliter more falluntur.*" Men dote too much (says He) upon their own crude and obstinate Reason; They measure *Spiritual Things* by *Things Corporeal*; Matters of *Faith* by Matters of *Sense*; from *visible Objects* They deduce Inferences about *Things Invisible*, and thus are led into Error.

(It may not be improper if I close this Discourse with an Exhortation or two, by a decent Humility, to become amiable to our Fellow-Creatures, and prudently submissive to the Divine Will.

LET us consider then, that we are Creatures, and sinful Ones likewise; that there are some bad Dispositions common to us all, which will yield us Matter of Conflict as well as Exercise during the longest Period of Life to correct; and from such Contem-
plations

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plations of our Frailty, let us lament our Unworthiness, and fix our Confidence in God instead of Ourselves. Our Incapacity of atoning for our own Offence, bespeaks so much Demerit, as should create Shame instead of Pride; and our Lord's Condescension in expiating our Guilt, by his own voluntary Death, should affect us with Modesty, and with Love to each other, as we had Him for Example. Human Arrogance here finds an unanswerable Confutation, and a Garment of Sackcloth would be a Dress more becoming the acquired Deficiencies of Human Nature, than vainly to boast of our fine Linnen, and of our faring sumptuously every Day.

REFLECTIONS on our Necessities will put Presumption to the Blush; Confidence and Self-Sufficiency will be deeply wounded, and We shall discover the Deformity and Ignorance of Ostentation.

To fancy that we have more Knowledge than we have, is a Demonstration to the World that we have None; to over-value Ourselves upon our Wealth is to rate our Estate by it's Lumber, and to be conceited with our own Characters, is Motive to no Applause, but the false Commendation of Ourselves and Sycophants.

LET

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LET us but make a proper Estimate of our best Proficiency in Knowledge, and we shall find it very shallow and unextended, a bad Support for human Pride. The Perverseness of our Passions; the Obstinacy of our Wills; and the Hypocrisy of our Hearts, all concur to proclaim our Want of Merit, and are so many convincing Arguments of the Necessity of Humility.

“*Nil aliud est Homo* (says St. Bernard “in his Book of the Soul) *quam Sperma* “*foetidum, Saccus Stercorum, Cibus Vermis* “*um: Post Hominem Vermis, post Vermem* “*Fætor, sic in non Hominem vertitur om-* “*nis Homo.* And again, *Unde superbit, cu-* “*jus Conceptio Culpa, nasci Pæna, Labor* “*Vita, necesse mori.*”

ALL which is too little to stem the Torrent of human Vanity, or administer to Man's Matter of Mortification. The daily Prospect of the Grave, the Deformity of Death and the Apprehension of God's Tribunal, instead of lowering our Thoughts, and giving us a Taste for Humility, (thro' a wretched Ignorance of Ourselves) enflame our Vanity and nourish our Pride. And if we glory in This, let us remember that we glory in our Shame.

BUT

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BUT Lastly: Since not only the Pleasures of Social Life are thus interrupted by this foolish Passion, but fundamental Errors are often espous'd by it, let us be careful not to set up Human Reason as the Standard of all possible Truth, and in the Mysteries of Religion let us acquiesce with the Account which God has thought proper to reveal of them. Religious Pride, of all others is the most inflexible; It charms the Mind at the Time it is imposing on it, and if once We are brought into it's Captivity, the intellectual Faculties will be deprived of their several Uses, and Arguments for Conviction, instead of gaining Admittance, will prove so many Incentives to Wrath and Indignation.

EVEN the Miracles of Christ could not prevent the Effects of this supercilious Ignorance, and the Pharisee's Blindness was so incurable, that Persecution and Revenge, instead of Love and Esteem, attended the Promulgation of his Heavenly Doctrine.

IN short; Pomp and Vain-Glory are but counterfeited Beauties; the Pleasure of Ambition flat and insipid, and what Pride now suggests to us as a real Excellency, will be prov'd by Experience base and pitiful, and we shall repent that we were ever seduced by it.

it.—“ Behold I have made Thee small a-
 “ mong the Heathen says the Prophet in his
 “ Account of the Destruction of *Edom*) Thou
 “ art greatly despised: The Pride of Thy
 “ Heart hath deceived Thee: Tho’ Thou
 “ exaltest Thyself as an Eagle, and settest
 “ thy Nest amongst the Stars, thence will I
 “ bring Thee down saith the Lord.”

If our Situation in Life be *low*, let us
 learn to be contented with it; if *plentiful*, let
 us not be unmindful of the Divine Bounty,
 from whence it comes. If we are promoted
 above Others to Places of Honour or Trust,
 let us guard against the Temptations of so
 much Greatness; let us take Care that our
 Heads don’t grow giddy with our Advance-
 ment, but, amidst all our Grandeur, let us
 be cloathed with Humility.



A DIVINE PROVIDENCE considered and vindicated.

S E R M O N IX.

DEUTERON. xxxii. the latter Part of the
10th Verse.

—He kept him as the Apple of his Eye.

The Context runs thus:

*The Lord's Portion is his People: Jacob is the
Lot of his Inheritance: He found him in
a desert Land, and in the waste howling
Wilderness: He led him about, he instructed
him, He kept him as the Apple of his Eye.*

THROUGH a criminal Curiosity and
Inquisitiveness in Man, the Divine
Care over this lower World has ever been
the Subject of human Contention. And yet
there is not a Subject in Nature, in which
Men might more reasonably acquiesce, than
in that Care which is taken of them every
Moment of Life.

Y

OUR

OUR own Strength is too nearly related to Weakness, to repel the Violence of outward Misfortunes, and our Sagacity borders too much upon Folly to prevent (by any Foresight) their coming upon us. Without a Divine and Heavenly Interposition we should incautiously walk upon Danger and Precipice; Misfortune and Misery would be in all our Ways, and we should as readily embrace them, as if they were in Reality our Security and Happiness.

WELL therefore might *Moses*, in this Divine Song (of which my Text is a Part) so beautifully describe the Providence of God over the Children of *Israel*, seeing it would have appeared to their great Sorrow, that nothing but Destruction had been the Lot and Portion of their Inheritance, had he not manifested himself to *Jacob* in the desert Land, had he not led him about, and instructed him, and providentially kept him as the Apple of his Eye.

It may not be improper therefore in my enlarging a little upon this Subject, if I endeavour in the

First Place To remove and set aside those Cavils and Objections which (thro' the

the Weakness of human Reason) have been raised against the providential Care of God: And

Secondly, If I consider how we ought to behave Ourselves under so great a Blessing.

THAT God did not extend his Care over those Things which at first he gave Being to, when he made all Things by the Word of his Power, was an Objection made, and obstinately persisted in by the *Epicureans*: And the *Stoicks* differed but very little in Opinion and Principle, putting all Things under the Power of a Fatal Necessity.

THESE Notions are so full of Contradiction and Absurdity, that the Espousers of them would not have deserved the least Share of common Pity, had they not wanted the Benefit of a Divine Revelation.

SOME of the Heathens indeed had better Opinions concerning the Care of this lower World, and discovered *That* by the Eminence of their Reason, which others could not do for Want of Scripture.

SENECA gives us a very strong Intimation of his believing the Truth and Certainty of

a Providence, when he declares that every Thing we do or suffer here, comes from above: And what would become of Sanctity (according to the Observation of the Roman Orator) if the Gods had no Care or Regard for Mens Actions?

So that if Fate or Necessity was to govern this World, all Joy and Comfort would be banished at once from the Minds at least of Those, who have now the Power and Pleasure of Thinking. Should human Affairs be left under such a strange and unhappy Government, every Man, who can reflect on what is past, or has any Prospect of what is to come, must labour under very black and melancholy Apprehensions; His Hope will be converted into perfect Despair, and his Fear enhanc'd with numberless Aggravations. He must have nothing in his Thoughts but Rocks and Quick sands, when he is thus sailing in a stormy and tempestuous Sea, without any Pilot to steer or direct him.

LET the Government of this World be considered in what Light we please, yet still, if we exclude the Providence of God, the World itself will be so miserable a Place, that no Person of any Reflection will be able to live or enjoy himself in it. Counsel
and

and Advice (upon this Supposition) will become insignificant and useless Terms; our Complaints of Injuries will meet with no Redress; nor Obligations lye on us for Favours we receive. Let our Conduct be what it will (upon this wild Supposition) it will be just the same Thing; if our Circumstances be bad, we can have no Refuge for Relief; and if they be good, we may be deprived of them without Remedy by this wandering Whirlwind of Fate and Necessity.

It will be objected, I suppose, by the Espousers of this Doctrine, that we are to be directed in our Conduct by Men of Knowledge and Sagacity; in Answer to which we may safely aver, that, exclusive of a Divine and Heavenly Providence to steer *Them* in their Direction, We shall be in as bad a Condition as we were before.

THE most discerning and politick Men sometimes make but an indifferent Use of their Reason; such (I mean) as proves injurious and prejudicial to Those who are in Subjection to them.

UNDER such an Administration we should have the Yoke of arbitrary Power added to the Bands of Fate, laid on us before, which if not directed and managed

naged by an unerring Reason (which seldom appears in the Conduct of Man) would make our Condition more intollerable than it was before. In this Case we should be forced to submit to the Plundering and Cruelty, the Indignity and Insolence of every one, blessed with more Strength than Ourselves; unless he should happen to be of a generous Disposition, and a Will not bent upon oppressing and ruining us. In both these Cases (if Providence be exclud'd) the Life of a Brute will be preferable to Ours, and we had better be incapable of thinking at all, than to be *Men* upon such sad and uncomfortable Terms.

BESIDES; Nature, considered in it's corrupt Condition, is very much inclined to Confusion and Anarchy. The Passions of Men, view'd in this Light, will appear so very uneasy under every Restraint, that it is really astonishing to find them kept in any Order at all. For considering the vast Disproportion there is between those in Subjection, and those who govern, it is very surprizing that an unbounded Liberty is not frequently struck at, or that the least Regard whatever is paid to any Laws, enacted by those who preside and bear Rule.

NAY; it is Matter of no small Wonder, and what

what points out the Footsteps of an overruling Providence, that Government itself (if render'd odious by ill Conduct, or by the provoking Oppression of Men sitting at it's Helm) should not occasion it's own Destruction : That where the sordid Inclinations of Men in Trust, grown jealous of the Interest of one another, and apprehensive which wallows least in publick Wealth, these Things, I say, with many others seriously thought on, are no mean Arguments of God's peculiar Care, who stills the Noise of Faction, and the Tumults of the People.

SUCH is the Vigilance (if I may so call it) of the Almighty ; his Providence so great for the Good of Mankind, and the other Works of his Hands, that he has ever display'd it in the Defence of Government, and wonderfully defeated the most probable Schemes and Conspiracies of it's Enemies.

NEITHER has it been less visible in the Preservation of the Jewish and Christian Church ; whose ordinary Condition was to be *afflicted*, but not *forsaken*, *persecuted*, but not *destroy'd* ; to struggle with the most powerful and malicious Adversaries under all imaginable Disadvantage, and yet rise superior to it ; meet with violent Opposition
from

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from the Gates of Hell, whose Malice at the same Time was not to prevail against it.

THUS during the Jewish Residence in the promised Land, their Enemies were so numerous, so dreadful and resolute, that their Safety could proceed from Nothing but an extraordinary Act of Divine Care. They were block'd in on every Side by the *Morabites* and *Chaldeans*, the *Egyptians* and *Affyrians*; so that not one Passage was left open, by which they might make their Escape; and had not God timely interposed, and led them safe thro' their Enemies, They had unavoidably fallen into their Hands.

BUT we need not have Recourse to Conspiracies form'd against the *Jewish* Church, which was only an Emblem of what was to befall it in succeeding Times, and whose Calamities have been verify'd in the horrid Attempts made against the Christian. Scarce an Age has pass'd without a Design of this Nature, either of corrupting it's Purity with some base Principles, or perverting it's Doctrines with some unwholsome Tenets. The heretical Opinions of past Ages have been, and are, in our own Days, revived with as much Warmth and Zeal as if they were perfectly new Discoveries; the *Arrian* Scheme has been propagated with too much Success
under

Under the Influence of some Men in exalted Stations, and the *Erglian* Doctrine, of laying aside all divine Authority in the Church, embraced by those Persons whose Religion and Office require them to enter into a Confutation of such Tenets.

THE Rise and Progress of the Papal Usurpation, with the many bad Effects it produced upon the Monarchy, Nation and Church, are very impartially and judiciously considered by a late worthy Divine of our own: And the cruel Design of this Day is a notorious Instance of the Romish, unchristian Zeal, levelled against the Establishment both of Church and State.

THE Funeral Pile was prepared and laid in Order; the Jesuitical Priest was ready to offer up the bloody Sacrifice, and the two great Bodies of this Kingdom were to have fallen a Sacrifice to the rash Temper of *Elias*, (had not Providence interposed) without a Moment to prepare for another World.

NATIONAL Destruction was the Point in View, and rather than leave it un-attained, some of their own Friends were destined to the Flames, rather than be balked in their Hellish Intention: Copying after the Pattern of the desperate Tetrarch, who is said to

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have

have murdered his own Son amongst the Innocents at *Bethlehem*, rather than let the new-born Jesus escape his Anger. Zealots these! who in accomplishing their Design can dispense with sacrificing some of their own Party; and are such Masters of desperate Bravery, that the intended Executioner (according to the History of the Day) declared himself willing to have dy'd in the common Calamity, rather than have left it unaccomplished.

BUT what are all human Contrivances in Opposition to a Divine super-intending Power? Is there any Counsel, Wisdom or Understanding against the Lord?

A LARGE Prospect may feed the growing Hopes of the Designing, and the begotten Monster may thrive till within few Days of its Birth, but here Heaven generally interposes, strangles it in the Delivery, and destroys the wicked Parent with it's expected Offspring.

THUS *Julian*, (fornamed the Apostate) in his Conspiracy to unhinge the Christian Religion, was providentially balked in his wicked and daring Design, and his Life was taken from him by an unknown Executioner. And the favourite Servant of a wicked King,

King, who had basely purchased his Master's Decree utterly to destroy the Jewish People, perished Himself on the Instrument he had provided for an innocent Man's Destruction.

From this Consideration then that God does overlook us, and makes us the daily Objects of his Care; that he superintends all our Affairs, and governs the Powers of Nature, as well as the Powers of Mankind, under such an Administration we may live like Men, and enjoy this World with Pleasure and Delight.

THOUGH every Thing should not happen just as we desire, yet our Hope will support us, when God is our King: We may contentedly bear any present uneasy Circumstances, which may be suffered to fall on us for our Good, and by entertaining a chearful Dependance on a Divine Providence, we may blunt the Edge of all human Misfortunes.

WHAT our Behaviour ought to be under so great a Blessing, was the Other Point I proposed to consider.

Is the Divine Protection then thus continually employ'd in the Behalf of Mankind,

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We may from hence learn how much it is our Duty to submit to the Dispensations of infinite Wisdom, and not suffer Ourselves to be seduced by any popular Objections, which the Infidel may raise against God's Providence.

THE Affairs of this Life cannot be too intricate for His Knowledge, who made all Things in Beauty and Order; nor Mankind with their Actions, so mean and contemptible, as to be beneath his Notice or unworthy his Observation. He thought proper at first to create our Bodies, and to give us Souls of an immortal Nature; and why it should be more difficult to preserve us when made, than to make us out of nothing, is a Knot perhaps too difficult to be untied by the Unbeliever. His Power and his Wisdom mov'd him in one Case; and these united with his Goodness, still incline him in the other.

So far therefore is Providence from undervaluing the Deity, that instead of *flaggering*, it should rather *confirm* our Faith. To disparage Mankind is so far from creating *greater* Difficulty in the Government of them, that it rather makes it *less*; and as for human Actions, with all the Concerns of Life, when they are put in the Scale *against*

gainst Immenſity, they will require, in that Light, but little Care to be taken of them.

THIS very Objection therefore, which represents Mankind ſo *ſmall* and *trifling*, makes the Rule and Government of them of Courſe leſs troubleſome.

BESIDES, the Man who fancies the Diſpoſal of human Concerns to be very intricate and confuſed; diſtracting and uneasy to the Mind of the Deity, interrupting or diſturbſing his Eternal Eaſe, has but a very pitiful Idea of the Perfections of God, and deſerves the Character of *Solomon's* Talker, when he tells us that *every Fool will be babbling*.

So far is this Objection from carrying any Weight with it, that there are ſeveral Things of an inferiour Nature (Part of God's own Creation) which loudly confute him in this idle Dream.

THE Sun (that I may mention but one Inſtance) can ſhed its Rays of Light and influence Things of a different Nature, and produce at the ſame different Effects, without any Hindrance to itſelf, or any the leaſt Interruption to it's Author's Happineſs. And why the Goodneſs of Almighty God ſhould

not impart itself much more easily to any created Being, is a Question which the Infidel may answer if he can.

In Disputes therefore should arise concerning Religion, or any Attempts be made to seduce us in our Faith of an over-ruling Providence, let us remember that we are to reject such evil Counsellors, who would make their God as infirm as themselves.

But Secondly: Has the Divine Care been particularly visible in the Defence of Government, and Protection of the Church, we may hence learn how much we ought to regard both, and be thankful to God for so happy a Preservation.

HAD the Contrivance of this Day taken Effect, the Loss of the Protestant Religion had been irreparable. A Religion! supported by Scripture, and confirmed by the Practice of the Primitive Church: Not ushered into the World by Blood or Violence, but introduced by the prevailing Methods of Love and Peace.

HAD the Attempt made upon This provid successful, This Nation must have been involved in Misery and Destruction. We must have changed our Principles, or embraced a Stake;

Stake; Our Faith must have submitted to *Romish* Impositions; or our Lives have fallen a Sacrifice to their Fury and Indignation: Our sacred Oaths must have been revoked, or Imprisonment and Fire have been our Fortune: Our Consciences must have been tortured, and reproach'd us for Cowards; or our Bodies have undergone the Discipline of an Inquisition.

SUCH would have been the terrifying Proposals made unto us: To have changed the pure and Apostolical Religion for a modern Innovation; begun by Interest, carry'd on by Force and supported by Villany; whose Articles of Faith are at best absurd, and in one particular Instance, no better than Blasphemy.

AGAINST such desperate Onsets of Antichristian Fury, God has been wonderfully pleased in a providential Manner to support his Church, and rais'd it's Head when the Waves of Popery were beating against it. The Device of the *Romans* was of no Effect, and the Counsels of the *Jesuits* were cast out and defeated.

SUCH a seasonable Interposition of Heaven reasonably teaches us to abhor those Principles which lead to such bloody Practices

tices of murdering all that are not in Communion with them, and to admire that charitable Temper of Christ, who came not to destroy *Mans* Lives, but by the persuasive Eloquence of Meekness and Humility to reform and save them.

In short, since we are the constant Objects of the Divine Care, and are convinced of it by a daily and constant Experience, let us not stop the Stream of future Mercies by a wicked Ingratitude for those which are pass'd. Let us not ascribe our great Success to our own shallow Knowledge or Wisdom, but unto his Name be the Praise, who sitteth in the Heavens, and over-ruleth all Things.

LET us not say of these Mercies (in Order to magnify either our Policy or Power) as the proud *Affyrian* did of his *Babylon*, "Is not this the great *Babylon* which I have built for my Honour and Renown?" but rather let us write them in the most durable Characters, that our Posterity may know them, and praise the Lord for the merciful Works he did in the Days of old, before them.

BUT *Lastly*: Does God protect us against the Designs of wicked Men, and timely rescue

rescue us from impending Danger? Let us remember, that to despond under any Condition, which may befall us in Life, betrays a Disbelief of the Doctrine of my Text, and makes us unworthy the Divine Protection. Let us confide in that Almighty Arm which saved the sinking Apostle in his Despair; and shake off that timorous Outcry, *We perish*, when we are under the Inspection of infinite Knowledge; and have Omnipotence to defend us against the malicious Efforts of designing Men.

AND in order to secure Ourselves in the Divine Favour, and continue his Care and Providence over us, Let us endeavour to make Ourselves in some Degree worthy of it, by a lively Observance of the Precepts of Christianity, and a steady Belief of his Divine Perfections.

THEN let the Heathen furiously rage together, and the People imagine a foolish Thing: Let the Rulers take Counsel together against us, when we have thus secured the Lord and his Anointed for our Friend; He that dwelleth in Heaven shall laugh them to scorn; the Lord shall have them in Derision.

THEN we need not be afraid of ten
A a Thousands

Thousands of the People, that have set themselves against us round about: For Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; and, if by Duty and Obedience we continue his People, Providence will secure us in this present World, and his Blessing will be for ever upon us in the next.



God's Love to Mankind express'd in
the Incarnation of our Saviour.

S E R M O N X.

II. TIM. i. 10.

— *And hath brought Life and Immortality
to Light through the Gospel.*

OF all the Advantages which ever befall
Mankind unexpected as well as unde-
served, there is not one that lays a greater
Claim to our Wonder, or that strikes us with
a more agreeable Surprise, than the Myste-
rious Work of Man's Redemption. The
ready and most discerning Contrivances of
one Creature for the Relief of another (may
they be blessed with the most happy Suc-
cess) will be nothing when put in the Bal-
ance with this: The most regular and well
conducted Schemes will, upon this Com-
parison, be no better than Folly; The best
Discoveries even of Philosophy will appear

but a vexatious and fruitless Vanity; and the beautiful Chain of Eloquence (how taking soever with Men) will be shattered and un-link'd, when put in Competition with the Word of God.

OUR Love therefore and our Praise, as they are naturally excited in us by Acts of Compassion, must necessarily rise in Proportion to those Favours, which are conferred on us, and as much as the Soul is preferable to the Body, so much the Beneficence of our great Redeemer transcends the Esteem of our Fellow-Creatures.

To be raised from a State of Endless Misery, to the glorious Liberty of the Sons of God, has something in it vastly superior to any friendly Caution against approaching Danger; tho' at the same Time a grateful Acknowledgment is the least Return we can make for so kind a Provision for our Safety.

OUR Liberty, thro' the Infection of Original Sin, became so bounded and uncomfortable, that Confinement of the most shocking Nature seemed entailed upon us by our first offending Parents, as a most sure and lasting Patrimony. This rendered Man so mean and ridiculous, that he seem'd not so much

much lost to his *Happiness* as to *Himself*: To have divested himself of his Being and the glorious Perfections belonging to it, which were capable of making any Place a Paradise; but without which, the Garden of the Lord, was no *Eden*; no Seat either of Pleasure or Satisfaction.

THE Faculties of his Soul were (in a manner) already seized by Death; The Pleasures of his Life were basely corrupted, and his constant Apprehension of impending Punishment kept him in constant Pain and Misery.—In this wretched and unhappy Condition, wandering in the Mazes of Ignorance and Error, the *Divine Mercy* reached out it's Arm to fallen Man, when no other Assistance could relieve him. No Creature either in Heaven or Earth was able to atone for what he had done; the most costly sacrifices could not expiate for Original Guilt, nor the Fruit of the *Body* make any Satisfaction for the Sin of the *Soul*.

HERE the wonderful Compassion of God interposed; the ever-blessed Son became incarnate, and by a compleat and perfect Sacrifice, having removed those Clouds which darkened Men's Minds, He brought Life and Immortality to Light thro' the Gospel.

It shall be my endeavour in discoursing on these Words, as they relate to the Redemption of Mankind, to shew

First, THAT Man of himself has no Title at all to Immortal Happiness:

Secondly, THAT the Law of Moses (exclusive of the Gospel) could not have effected it for Him; and then

Thirdly, I SHALL conclude with a few Observations on the Love of God to Mankind, expressed in the Incarnation of his Son.

THE Promise of Immortality was nothing but a free and voluntary Gift of our wise Creator, in no Measure merited by the Works of Man. During a State of Innocence when He stood adorned with all possible *Perfections*, and render'd a most unblemish'd, uniform Obedience to his Maker's Will, He could even *then* lay no Claim to *any Thing* upon Point of Desert, much less to the Reward of endless Glory. His Being was given him by Divine Pleasure, and therefore he must acknowledge it due to Divine Will. He had nothing of all his Possessions but what he received from above,

bove, and what was liable at Pleasure to be remanded back. His Dominion, though it extended to all sublunary Things, was never exercised upon himself: And though every Thing was made subservient to his Commands, yet he was but an impotent, infirm Creature, not able to add one Cubit to his Stature.

THAT He (who was not able to keep himself from deserving the Displeasure of his Maker, who placed him in a State where no Error was) should be so singularly favoured as to have a natural Claim to Happiness stamp'd upon him, would derogate much from the Wisdom of God, who foresaw from Eternity the Thoughts of Man's Heart. His very *Being* was more than the most regular Obedience could make a Return for; and there will be but little Room then for this Heavenly Claim, when we add to it the excellent Endowments of his Nature.

His Preservation in Life is an Act which infinitely exceeds the best Sacrifices he can offer, and his daily Sustenance is very liberal Wages for that Service, which is due from a Creature to his Creator. And if we descend to particular Scrutinies, by examining the Performances of his Duty, we shall find
him

him to have so little Claim to Happiness that (without the Interposition of a dying Redeemer) he has a much likelier Prospect of endless Misery.

EVERY Creature of the Universe severally discovers more Gratitude than Man, and pays a more constant Tribute to it's Maker. The Locust, the Frog and the Caterpillar readily obey the sovereign Word of Heaven, and (as the Psalmist observes) at his Command, in Defiance of Death enter the Chambers of Kings, when ordered by the Almighty, as a scourge for their Iniquity. But Man! (grown Insolent with abused Indulgence) scrupled at the first and most easy Trial of Obedience.

HAD he offered the best of his Possessions, and been most punctual in observing every Command; his Actions even then, had not been so perfectly meritorious, as to have had a Right to Happiness as the natural Consequence of them; finite Performances when put in the Scale against infinite Rewards, amounting only to the Value of Solomon's Estimate of the World; "much lighter than Vanity itself." Even tho' the sharpest Afflictions had attended the Discharge of his Duty; this would not have given him an unanswerable Title to it, but he might have
contented

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contented himself with the Words of the Apostle, and thought the Suffering of the present Times, not worthy to be compared with that more exceeding and Eternal Weight of Glory to be revealed.

BUT still it is certain that God breathed into him an immortal Soul, not with any Design of torturing or destroying it; but that it might be made Partaker of Everlasting Glory.

AND whether the Law of Moses (exclusive of the Gospel) was capable of effecting this for him, was the

Second THING I proposed to speak to.

It was the infinite Wisdom and Power of God, which, in the first Ages of the World, so wonderfully ordered and over-ruled Affairs, that they might typify and represent the great Undertaking, which was afterwards to be revealed; by which Method the Age of the Patriarchs became only an Introduction to that of the Gospel. He did not think proper immediately to put this new Dispensation in Practice, with all it's Power and Demonstration, all it's Advantage and Lustre, with which in the Fulness of Time it was to be recommend-

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ed to the World ; because the Delay left Room for many previous Passages, which conspired to introduce it with more Glory and Success.

BESIDES ; a little Reflection will convince us that it was a peculiar Advantage attending the Gospel, that it succeeded a Dispensation so burthensome as *That* of the *Jewish* Economy ; the severe Discipline of which adds a Grace and Sweetness to *that* Liberty, opened to us by the Appearance of our blessed Lord.

AND tho' this was for some Time delay'd ; yet the Providence of God so wisely contrived it, that every considerable Event, after the Fall of Man, contributed to the forming a more solemn and sacred Pomp, (as it were) to usher the great Bridegroom out of his Chamber, and introduce among us the Captain of our Salvation.

NAY the very Order and Disposition of Things sufficiently assure us, that the Law (as merely positive) was not altogether necessary to Salvation ; that it was to be but a long Interval between the Age of the Patriarchs and that of the Messiah ; and with Regard to any intrinsick Excellency of it's own, it might have been omitted and very well spared.

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It was nothing but a temporary Institution; the whole Frame of it being manifestly founded on Relation, and it's greatest Use pointing to a better Covenant, something much preferable and more desirous than itself. Let us but abstract it from that Typical and Relative Regard, and it will appear at once unworthy of its Author; a Dispensation the most trifling, as well as most loaded with Rites and Ceremonies. No Wonder therefore that the Heathens could raise Objections of that Nature against it, which *Philo* (though a Jew of no mean Learning) for want of a true Notion of it, was not able to answer.

THAT it was liable to Change, and not intended as a *necessary* Rule, or established as a *perpetual* one, the Lateness of it's Date enough demonstrates. For had it been otherwise, God certainly would never have suffered the Patriarchs of former Periods (to whose Virtue and Faith He gave such ample Testimony) to have been ignorant of it.

THE Expiration of it's peculiar Institutions was not so much their Destruction, as the Accomplishment of that End, for which they were enacted: *That* indeed which

was meerly Shadow vanished at the Manifestation of the Substance; but several Customs were adopted by our Saviour and his Apostles; introduced into the Church, and then improved into a more reasonable Service.

CIRCUMCISION (for Instance) was advanced into a better Sacrament; more useful, easy and extensive in it's Application. The Sabbath became the Day of the Lord; which, considered as the seventh Part of Time, we still commemorate God's Rest thereon, and as the first, we celebrate our Redemption from Egyptian Slavery, and a full Assurance of Victory over Death, by the Resurrection of Christ upon that Day.

THE great Feast of Atonement, with all other bloody Sacrifices under the Dispensation of *Moses* were finally accomplished upon the Cross; the Memory of which is solemnly recollected by the Christian Church on the Passion Day.

FROM these, and the like, Considerations which may be brought to illustrate the Books of the Old with That of the New Testament, it is obvious to observe that One was only the Shadow of the Other; and as *the Blood of Bulls and of Goats could not take away Sins, so we are sanctified thro' the Offering of the Body of Christ, once for all.*

BUT

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BUT still though the Mosaick Dispensation was not of itself capable of procuring Eternal Happiness for Man, yet the Figurative Indications it contained of the Kingdom of Christ, gave it so great and true a Resemblance, that it was no Difficulty to discover it's Design, through the many Clouds with which it was darkened. So that when our Redeemer began the Work of our Deliverance, and took our Flesh upon him, in order to establish the Gospel in all it's Parts, He was only the Restorer of that most ancient Religion, which had been begun long before the Days of *Moses*. And so happily did he effect this mighty Undertaking, that the Religion he came to cultivate amongst Mankind, was in it's Precepts so pure, and in it's Injunctions so accurate, that none before it was ever so comfortable, or of so great Advantage to the Souls of Men.

OTHERS were so stained with human Novelties, or adapted to the customary Corruptions of the Place, for which they were calculated, that they scrupled not to wink at, and tacitly approve of Things in their Natures unjustifiable.

BUT all licentious and immoral Practices are absolutely forbidden by the Tenour of the

the Gospel. It is a Book in which all our Members are written, and curbed by proper and necessary Restraints. The Tongue is held as it were with a Bridle, and there is Light to direct our Feet in the Way of Salvation. The very secret Corners of Darkness are searched out by it, and Vanity chastised in the very Imagination.

THE Certainty and Truth of Punishments and Rewards is not only clear'd up, but such startling Accounts given of them, as want only Consideration to make them effectual on our Lives. We must now break through the Horror of everlasting Fire and resist the engaging Charms of Eternal Bliss, before we dare transgress the Laws of God. In a Word; The Necessity of this Duty was not only established by the Coming of our Redeemer in the Flesh, but the Instances of it raised to a much nobler Degree, than they were before.

IN the Cases of Murder, of Oaths and Charity, there is something respectively added by Christ, more than was said by them of old Time: Some Things that were indulged the Jew, and supposed lawful, being by the Gospel Covenant utterly forbid the Practice of a Christian. For which Reason (with some others) It is said, that except

cept our Righteousness exceed *That* of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Our Helps and Encouragements being so much greater, it is but reasonable that our Returns should be proportionable.

FROM whence I proceed to the Last Thing propos'd; to conclude with a few Observations on the Love of God, expressed (as at this Season) in the Incarnation of his Son.

HERE a large Field opens itself before us; too great for the Description of human Fancy.

BEFORE we had a Being his Love extended itself unto us; and our Happiness in his Decrees preceded our Existence in this World. His Goodness was so much the Motive of itself, that even our Creation was nothing but the Effect of it. Our Merit could upon no Pretence lay the least Claim to it, because he was pleased to confer it on us numerous Ages before we were. Our Existence was a Condition where nothing in us could be a Motive to his Affection; and our Enmity afterwards proceeding farther, render'd us justly worthy of his Detestation; by this Means esteeming his Love

as nothing, unless it conquered all Obstacles, and acted without any Motives at all. Which gave the Apostle very good Reason to say, that God commendeth his Love towards us; in that whilst we were yet Sinners, Christ died for us.

To this if we add his Readiness in undertaking the Mysterious Work of our Redemption, without the least Prospect of any additional Glory to himself; his tender Regard for us will still advance as fast as our Enquiries.

His Happiness was nothing but Perfection itself; and therefore he could propose no Advantage on that Side, because the best Returns of Praise and Thanksgiving could not add one Tittle to it.—“Can a Man, (says *Eliphaz* in the Book of *Job*) be profitable unto God, as He that is wise may be to himself? Is it any Pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous? Or is it Gain unto him, that thou makest thy Way perfect.”

OUR best Wishes can aim at nothing worthy of him, unless instructed by what he already enjoys. Even our Love is incapable of discharging our Debts; it being too much the *Effect*, to become the *Recompence*

peace of God's Affection. His whole Life, though but one continued Miracle, was attended with Mockery and Contempt; and he appeared sometimes in so despicable a Condition, that Men could not discover his Deity by any Thing but his Goodness, which was too great not to belong incommunicably to him.

AND notwithstanding he was acquainted with our Weakness, and knew that we could make no Returns for his Beneficence, yet still he *went about doing Good*. He wrought his Wonders for a Generation, which ascribed them to the Power of Hell, and he received such unparallell'd Returns of Ingratitude, that it was not the least of his mighty Works, that he vouchsafed to do them for such blasphemous Wretches. Nay, to make Men sensible how much he valued them above those Creatures which were set up for Idols, He oftentimes altered the Course of Nature for their Relief, and revers'd the Laws established in the Universe, to engage them to obey those of God.

His restless Love would not be satisfied 'till his Wisdom had contrived the Salvation of Man, so as to reconcile his Justice and Mercy together; and tho' it could not be effected without going through the Tragedy

of Spilling his own Blood, yet his Thoughts were never diverted from finishing the Design, nor his Resolution staggered, though he was subject to the Passions of Hope and Fear. Every bitter Circumstance he opposed with an uncommon Degree of Chearfulness, and bore every Trial with an amazing Constancy. Having done so much to make himself the Object of Men's Faith, and to engage them in the Belief of his Divine Mission, He would not be invited down from Cross, though the Chief Priests declared they would then believe him; Resolving not to decline even an ignominious Death for the Conviction of a Jew, for whom he had (to no Purpose) wrought so many Miracles. He died indeed only in his human Nature; but, as there was a personal Union with the Divine, it made the Sacrifice infinitely valuable.

FROM his absolute Perfection then in all moral Excellency (which is the true Scripture Account of his Holiness) so eminently display'd in the Redemption of Mankind, we may reasonably conclude Sin (considered as a Contradiction to his Perfection and Rectitude) to come naturally under his Hatred and Aversion: And as he made himself subject to the Law of God, to give us a perfect Example of Religion in our Nature, that a constant Care is required in us to promote that Religion

Religion and Holiness amongst Mankind, which was contrived for us by the wise and eternal Counsel of Heaven.

THE very Act of *Creation* gave him a just Title to all that we enjoyed before our Redemption; and after he had purchased us (as the Apostle speaks) with a Price, all our Religious Acknowledgments (arising from the Nature of our Preservation) cannot be denied to be his undoubted Right. And to whom, upon any Consideration, can our best Performances be more worthily dedicated, than to the Author of our Salvation; whose Service is burden'd with no vexatious Ceremonies, nor confin'd by such severe and narrow Bounds, as to exclude the Enjoyment of an innocent Liberty: Obedience to God being nothing less than the greatest and most happy Command of *Ourselves*.

EVERY Appetite and Power within us, when subservient to the Laws of the Almighty, may properly be said to be subject to the Dictates of Right Reason; and happily directed by our own rectify'd and regular Wills. To be guided by his Declaration gives the most perfect Freedom to the Mind; throws off every perverse Byass and real Restraint, and frees us from those Clouds of Error and Ignorance, which pre-

vented us from distinguishing *between Good and Evil.*

FROM these Considerations then let us seriously reflect with ourselves, what should be the Design of this eternal Consultation of Heaven; this almost inconceivable Condescension, to bring about this * happy Season, big with miraculous Instances of Mercy! Let us remember that God, who never decomposes the established Order in Nature, would not thus heap one Favour on another for any little or mean Purpose; much less for any Thing unbecoming the Purity and Perfection of his Being: That he did not descend from his Father's Presence to be born in the Flesh; to become a weak and helpless Infant, and a Man as mean and miserable as Earth and Hell could make him, merely that there might be a Generation of Men call'd Christians after him: The Effect was, no doubt, to be proportionable to the Cause; it was intended for our *Natures* more than our *Names*; and the Salvation of our Souls was the proposed End, to purify to himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works.—For this Purpose he lived and died; published and bequeathed to us the most compleat Precepts, and the most incomparable Example; Threatnings and Promises the most glorious and dreadful,

* The Nativity.

ful, with Arguments the most persuasive and convincing, such as the Wisdom, Goodness and Power of Heaven contrived and furnished out for the Benefit of Mankind.

LET That Religion therefore, (which he came to give us for our Ease and Advantage) as it is the greatest Blessing we possibly could desire, and much greater than we could ever deserve, be embraced by us, as attended with the greatest Obligation. Then we shall not make the Assurance granted us of the Forgiveness of our Sins a Motive to a wicked Life; but rather look upon it as the greatest Encouragement to a religious One. In a Word; we shall never run into the *Socinian* Objection, of thinking Christ could not die for our Reconciliation with the Father, whom They make to be reconciled to us before; but we shall rather add our greatest Praise and Thanksgiving, that he has got us a Pardon, upon Terms worthy of his Wisdom and Justice; his Holiness and Mercy. We shall gladly perform our Part of the Covenant, in order to enter into that Heavenly Kingdom, which God has brought us so nigh to by the Satisfaction of his Son.

Felicity not founded in the Gratification of Sensual Appetites.

S E R M O N XI.

I. COR. XV. 32.

Let us eat and drink, for To-morrow we die.

THE Apostle at the Beginning of this Chapter, having declared to the *Corinthians* that Jesus was crucified, dead and buried, and risen again from Death and the Grave, proceeds to prove the Necessity of a general Resurrection, and to establish the Belief of a future State of Rewards and Punishments. It had been asserted by some Pretenders to Wisdom in those Days that there was no Resurrection or Life after this; that Death put an absolute Period to the Existence of Soul as well as Body, and that the highest Degree therefore of Human Felicity consisted entirely in the Gratification of our Sensual Appetites.

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As this Doctrine tended to sap the Foundation of the Christian Scheme, being levelled directly against its chief corner Stone, it was very pertinently taken Notice of in this Manner by the Apostle, and amply confuted by a Chain of Arguments, recorded in this Chapter, in Defence of the Resurrection.

THE Opinions entertained concerning this Article of the Christian Faith were in the earliest Ages very numerous as well as different from each other. Had the Immortality of the Soul but necessarily have prov'd the Resurrection of the Body, the Heathens had, at first View, embrac'd Christianity; they amongst them (at least) who admitted the One, who never thought any Thing at all of the Other.

HAD the *Sadduces* on the other Hand been convinced of the separate Existence of the Soul, the Denial of Angel or Spirit had been thought by themselves a very idle Tale: They would have admitted the Reunion as easily as the *Pharisees*, and the Resurrection would consequently have been credited by both of them.

BUT Those to whom *St. Paul* more immediately

mediately directed these Arguments here recorded, were his New Converts to the Christian Religion, who did not in general disbelieve this Article, did not doubt of, or scruple the Resurrection of Christ, but only call'd in Question the Resurrection of Mankind in Pursuance or in Consequence of it. The Apostle therefore does not argue with them as with Infidels, who credit nothing at all, nor as with Heathens who admit of no Scripture, either relating to the Jewish or Christian Doctrines; but considers them as allowing one Part of Christianity, from which Concession he forms his Arguments, to convince them that they ought to credit the other also.

THAT Christ was risen from the Dead (seen by *Cephas*, then by the Twelve, and afterwards by five Hundred Brethren at once) is what he lays down as granted by them; from the Denial of which He makes some Deductions in order to gain their Assent to the Doctrine proposed by him.

If Christ (says he) be not risen, then our Preaching is vain, and your Faith is also vain: Yea, and We are found false Witnesses of God, because we have testified of God, that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if the Dead rise not.

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And

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And upon this Supposition that Christ be not risen, and that the Dead in Consequence of it rise not, then They, who are fallen asleep in Christ, are perished: So let us eat and drink, for Tomorrow we die. Or as Dr. *Hammond* paraphrases upon the Words, "If the Dead rise not, there were some Place for that Saying of some amongst You, Let us enjoy the Good Things of this World at present, for within a while Death cometh, and then there's an End of all; Let us eat and drink, for Tomorrow we die."

THE Words are an Atheistical Temptation to Sensuality, founded upon the Pretence of no future Being either of Soul or Body after this Life: It may not be improper therefore (in order to vindicate the Doctrine of a future State, which is the Doctrine St. *Paul* would ratify by his Defence of the Resurrection) If I enquire in the

First PLACE, into the Nature of That Pleasure which is suggested in my Text to be the chief and only Happiness of Man.

Secondly, If I make it appear that there can be no Foundation at all for Happiness,

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pinefs, exclusive of Immortality or a future Life of Rewards and Punishments:—And

Laftly, If I conclude with a Deduction or two, which may be made from the foregoing Parts of this Discourse.

THE only Principle of Being which *Epicurus* and his Followers granted Mankind, was no more than the Engine or Fabrick of their Bodies. The Capacities of Human Nature (by which the Line of Human Happinefs muft neceffarily be meafured) by this Means was contracted into fo narrow a Compass, that it is no Wonder they fhould place their Felicity in fuch pitiful Pleafures, as ferved only to gratify their corporeal Senfes. All farther Sensation, than what refulted from the Contrivance of the Parts of Matter, was utterly excluded by this Tenet in their Philosophy, and therefore their principal and fupreme Delight (it is evident) was refolved into meer fenfual Enjoyments.

THIS Principle of the Epicurean Subtilty gives us fome Light into the Nature of my Text; and feems to agree fo exactly with it, that in all Probability they were the very People, whose Doctrine the Apoftle alluded

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to in this Argument. It is very expressly declared however that the Invention of Arts and Improvement of Sciences is no farther serviceable or to be regarded by Mankind, than as they administer and are subservient to the Gratification of our Appetites. A very grave and philosophical Account This, of the Divine Felicity of Human Nature! to make its Pleasure rise no higher, than the mean Satisfaction of pacifying a ravenous and hungry Palate.

Of this, some of the Refiners of their Master's Filthiness, were a little ashamed; and therefore in their Apologies for so mean an Account of this great Improvement of human Happiness and Wisdom, they made him to place his Sovereign Felicity in (that which he never did himself) the Operations of the Mind. All which makes no great Alteration, (upon our admitting it to be true) it being only a Cloak to disguise a Doctrine which would not bear the Light, and was too foul to be seen in it's native Dress. Instead of being founded then on the real and actual Pleasures of Sensuality, it is now advanced to a little more Honour, and made to entertain the Imagination with Reflections upon such Delights when past and gone.

If the Terms of *Eating* and *Drinking* are

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are (upon the whole) to be taken absolutely in a literal Sense (the Happiness I will not call it, but) the mean Pleasure of such a Scheme will be thought (I hope) too shameful to be patroniz'd by any one of common Decency; It being very much beneath the Dignity of human Nature to harbour Desires which are contented with such mean and pitiful Objects.

BUT suppose we should give them the Latitude desired, and understand by them not merely the Delights of the Body, but those pleasing Reflections which we subsequently enjoy, and that innocent Satisfaction of Mind, which is the natural Product of such Indulgencies; suppose the Appetite be quieted, and it's Necessities supply'd, and the Mind be lull'd into a perfect Tranquility, and affected with the greatest Joy at the Recollection of them; yet even *these* Concessions will not add to the Felicity proposed, because the whole of this Enjoyment will only consist in being delighted with the Remembrance of past Pleasures, and in some Dawning of Hope that others will succeed them.

WAS the Mind in this Case admitted to be capable of entertaining itself with any Pleasures separate from Corporal Ones, and
not

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not confined barely to provide for, or to reflect upon such Delights, then indeed it would have something of the *Image* of Happiness, and not be utterly swallowed up in Acts of Sensuality.

BUT when it is only made use of as an Instrument, necessary to promote the Repetition of such Pleasures, or of improving the Scene, by entertaining the Fancy, or feeding the Imagination after the Close of the Act; if this be all the Felicity these Sages proposed, they were Men of very low and brutish Taste; and their Happiness consisted in provoking their Appetites to *new* Desires, more than in reflecting upon Pleasures that are *gone*.

How base soever this Opinion may seem, hateful to Modesty, and to an ingenuous Person shameful, yet from their own Writings it will at any Time appear, that all their contemplative and philosophical Felicity was directed to, and terminated in *This* only.

I SHALL wave the Observation of that State of Indolence and (if I may so speak) their heavenly Stupidity, with which they occasionally palliated their other foul Tenets, thinking *This* sufficient to explain the Nature of
of

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of that Pleasure, on which they built their Happiness, and knowing the other to be incapable of giving any Advantage at all to it.

So that let this Opinion be considered in what Light it will, either as founding it's Pleasure in pampering the Senses, or diverting the Mind with the *Memory* of it; if this be *All* the Happiness of Mankind, then the subtle Priests of the Babylonish Idol had a considerable Share of it; who wanton'd in that Luxury which was every Day provided for their insensible God.

BUT that neither *This*, nor any other Enjoyment, (exclusive of a future State) can be any Foundation at all for Happiness, was the

Second THING proposed to be shew'd by me.

WAS all human Felicity confined to the Enjoyment of this present Life, it would be but of a very short Continuance, considered either as vain, or else as uncertain.

UNDER these Circumstances, Deceit and Treachery would obstruct the Satisfaction even of *solid* Pleasures, and their Meanness would make them but very trifling, though
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we add to them the considerable Benefit of Constancy.

BUT this is granting them too much: Experience proves them too fickle and uncertain to make any Part of a Man's real Happiness; the necessary Ingredients of that one Composition, being Satisfaction at present; and Security of it hereafter. A Defect in either of these will defeat this Scheme, and make the Project truly ridiculous.

THE most envy'd State, a Man can possibly arrive at, cannot screen him from the Trouble of knowing that injurious Accidents may befall him; amidst the sweetest Repose, which Reflections on his present Tranquillity may bless him with, he cannot but think that this Pleasure may shortly be succeeded by Pain, at least that he cannot be entirely secure from it; which Foresight must give a strange Check to all his Delights, and reduce (what he foolishly terms) his Happiness, into what scarce deserves the Name of the Absence of Misery.

ALL the Charms which Philosophy can yield us, will be of no real Use in absolutely exempting us from the Uneasinesses of Life: Patience indeed under present Misfortunes may serve a little to alleviate our Misery, but still

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still the Misfortune is in reality the same, notwithstanding we obstinately support ourselves under it. What I would observe here is, that though this Virtue may serve in some Cases to mitigate our Torment, yet unless some better Principles stepp'd in to our Help, than what were communicated to us by the Scheme I have been considering, in any *extreme* Case we should receive no Benefit at all from it.

WE may endeavour as much as we please, (merely I mean by the Strength of Imagination) to reduce a great Disorder into a little one; but after all our philosophical Applications to provoke *this* Fancy, we shall only throw a Reproach upon our Unhappiness, and endeavour to hide our Misfortune in our Folly.

As long then as it shall be out of our Power to forget that we have suffered by Accidents past, and that we cannot be free from *others* that may come upon us, so long must our Happiness be uncertain, or (I might rather say) so long will our Misery be sure.

BESIDES; Were we brought into Being with all the Blessings we ourselves could wish for, and were our Affairs surrounded with
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the most happy Success, yet after this seeming Perfection of Happiness, when no Hope was unsatisfy'd, nor Desire unanswer'd, the Consideration of Death would strike a Damp upon all our pleasing Circumstances, and convince us that in the midst of Life we were miserable. Here we can fix our Felicity in nothing but Death; which in the Sense of my Text, carries with it such Terror and Astonishment, as easily surmounts all other Resolutions. Even our Pleasure in this Case (to take no Notice of our antecedent Misery) would be no greater than the Happiness of Insensibility. The daily Dread of this Eternal Oblivion would fill us with woeful Apprehensions of our approaching End, under the Tortures of which nothing could support us, but a lively Expectation of Immortality.

To the Man who has been long oppressed with Affliction, and nothing to trust to but the Happiness of this World, this will be no small Addition to his Burthen, that so much of his Time (which at longest is but little) should be consumed and wasted in nothing but Trouble and Uneasiness: And to the Prosperous and Wealthy Eternal Death must be very terrifying.

BUT Virtue perhaps will now be usher-
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ed in to our Support; which, without the Consideration of a future State, will be rather an Enemy than a Friend to Happiness.

VIRTUE is undoubtedly the most noble, and most elevated Satisfaction of human Nature; but if it be considered abstractedly from all other Considerations, it will in this Separation signify but very little, and without Reward or Advantage be only a magnificent, empty Name.

SUPPOSE we consider it distinct from Prudence, and that we were doing a virtuous Thing without any Motive, or directing it to any wise End, we should act against the most known Dictate of Nature in doing what tended to *no good End at all*. That it is its own Reward and sufficient to its own Happiness is a ridiculous and empty Saying without Immortality, and what becomes the Mouth of a Roman rather than a Christian Hero.

THE Losses we may sustain purely upon this Account, can never be repaid us by Virtue alone. We may closely observe all the Cardinal Virtues; be stripp'd of our Fortunes for our Justice, and expose our Lives by observing Fortitude; and have nothing at all in Return for our Pains, if

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there be no other Præmium, but the unaccountable Happiness of having done so.

THAT we are under no Obligation to this without some Sanctions, some Reward or Punishment to enforce it, is what Nature itself never pretended to exact from us. This therefore can never be said to be a proper Bottom for human Happiness, which wants a Foundation to support itself. Upon this single Principle of a Life after this, depend all the Differences of Good and Evil; This but establish'd, Virtue is secure; but if not, it is nothing more than Policy or Nonfence. The Disbelief of Immortality will prove the Parent of Eternal Obscurity; will render the Seeds of Virtue ineffectual, and undermine the Foundation of all Human Happiness. Villany will have no Restraint, but what proceeds from the Terror of the Civil Magistrate; which will prove but a mean Motive for the proper Regulation of Mens Lives and Actions. Secret Offences will escape *His* Notice, and consequently the Punishment proper for them; or supposing they ever should come to Light, the publick Officer may be corrupt himself, *may bear the Sword of Justice in vain*, and suffer the Criminal to go unpunished.

THESE

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THESE Inconveniences would all be regulated by the Belief I am enforcing; the Sinner would think Darkness no Refuge for his Iniquity, and he would be deterred by the All-seeing Eye of God, notwithstanding he escaped the Eyes of Men. In short: Conscience, from such a Faith, would have a firm Establishment, and prevent actual Sins, by chastising them in the Imagination.

AN Inference or two, from what has been said upon this Subject, was proposed at first as a Conclusion to it.

Is the Pleasure mentioned in the Text too base then for the Happiness of human Nature? This may serve to inculcate the Necessity of Temperance, which is not only a necessary Christian Duty, but evidently an ornamental and becoming Virtue. Disgrace for Want of it stains the Christian Profession; Luxury by too many is thought a Virtue, and the pious Abstinence of the Primitive Saints laid by as an obsolete and starving Doctrine.

INDULGENCE and Excess enervate the Body, and make the Understanding incapable of Business; They destroy the Dominion

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minion of the Soul over the Body, and encourage Debauchery under the Influence of their Examples. The Hungry might be satisfy'd from the Wanton's Abundance, was a prudent Temperance but once become fashionable; and the Instruction of the Wise might improve the Ignorant, did not Wisdom dwindle into Stupidity and Sottishness.

SUCH Pleasures of Sense are injurious to Health, and pernicious to Religion; whilst the Practise of Temperance is of a more amiable Nature, and an excellent Preparation for a future Judgment.

BUT Lastly,

SINCE the only Foundation of Human Happiness can no where be discovered but in the Belief of a future State, our Practice should never contradict our Faith; and our Religion should be equal to, and adjusted by it. Our Devotions otherwise will be very imperfect Sacrifices, God will reject an outward Pretension to what we inwardly disbelieve, or at least to what (if we credit) we despise in our Lives.

THE World is vain in all it's Pleasures, and it's Promises deceitful: It's best Enjoyments

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joyments are tempered with Trouble, and Danger lies lurking on every Side. Let us then no longer be cheated by this false Disguise, nor place our Security where there is no Foundation for it. Let the *Infidel* delight himself with this short-liv'd Mirth, and expect his Happiness in a Brutish Death; whilst we are despising such Conformity with the World, and are renewing our Minds after the Likeness of Christ.

To withstand the Power of Temptations, and to over-rule the irregular Motions of degenerated Nature ('tis certain) requires some Pains and Difficulty: But then let it be remembered that the Victory will be rewarded with an invaluable Prize: A Prize! for which the Martyrs were contented to part with their Blood, and which the Saints in Glory joyfully purchased at the Expence of the World and all it's Sensual Delights.



Second the Eleventh

The Christian Dispensation
productive of happiness
S E R M O N
The Christian Dispensation

Example your righteousness
things of the Christian
fall in to the Christian
of the Christian
for which the Christian
W H E N the Christian
things of the Christian
found the Christian
with immortality and
Temple of God
Thieves and hypocrites

The Christian, which is the
one was good and
Glorious of the Christian

The Christian Dispensation most
productive of Happiness.

S E R M O N XII.

MATTH. V. 20.

Except your Righteousness exceed the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees Ye shall in no Case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

WHEN our blessed Lord came down from Heaven and brought the glad Tidings of Salvation to Mankind, he no sooner arrived to a Degree of Maturity but he found the Church so wretchedly over-run with Immorality and Superstition, that the Temple of God was become the Shelter of Thieves and Hypocrites.

THE Divine Law, which in its own Nature was pure and uncorrupt, through the Glosses of the Pharisee, was made subser-

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vient to all manner of Licentiousness ; so that *That* which should have been the Support of Innocence was become a Protection for the most flagrant Crimes. A *Form* of Godliness had superseded its decent Rites and Ceremonies, and the true Worship of God (through the Deceit of its Teachers) was dwindled into a mere Profession of Sanctity.

SUCH was the unhappy and deplorable State to which Religion was reduced thro' the sordid Practices of its corrupted Professors, that the Redeemer of Mankind judg'd it highly necessary to appear in it's Behalf in order to wipe off That Rust which it had been long contracting.—To this End we find him in his most excellent Discourse on the Mount establishing amongst his Disciples a Manly, Rational and Heroick Temper of Mind ; a System of Philosophy above the Pharisee's Reach, and infinitely superior to the Pretensions of a Pagan.—The Rule He prescrib'd for the Regulation of our Conduct was in it's original Appointment so agreeable to our Nature, that as nothing could possibly exceed it in Purity, so neither could any Thing exceed it in Holiness : The most profound Thoughts and wisest Sayings contained in the whole Body of Jewish and Heathen Writers falling infinitely short of that

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that beautiful Solidity which every Page of the Gospel affords us.

Our Errors, Prejudices, and Mistakes (whether they regard Ourselves or the Almighty, the Misery of this Life or the Happiness of the next) are here rectify'd, remov'd or corrected. The Tricks and Designs of the most political Sinner are so nakedly laid open and exposed to View, that they can possibly conceal themselves from no one's Eye, but from the Man who chuses Ignorance.

And that there might be nothing wanting to gain it an easy Credit amongst Men, its Arguments are offered in so prevailing a Manner, that it obliges us to acknowledge (as it were in Defiance of ourselves) that there is no Religion so worthy the Son of God to reveal, or the Sons of Men to receive, as that noble Scheme of true Piety and unaffected Morality which the Saviour of Mankind made known by the Gospel.

THE ushering this unexpected Doctrine into the World raised such Jealousy in the Observers of the Mosaick Dispensation, that they scrupled not at once to decry it as absurd, and to declare that the Author of it, in preaching the Doctrines of the Gospel,

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made void the Vigour and Precepts of the *Law*. A Declaration this! which enough points out to us how much Bigottry in Religion, as well as in the Civil Affairs of Life, proves prejudicial to our Minds; renders us incapable of forming right Judgments, by giving a strange Turn to our Manner of Thinking, 'till at last it hurries us into such Actions as are inconsistent with our Interest as well as our Ease.

THUS it fell out in the Days when the *Son of Righteousness* rose with Healing under his Wings, who, tho' he positively told them that he came not to destroy but to fulfil, was notwithstanding accus'd by the Jewish Doctors of that very Crime which They themselves only were guilty of. In this Chapter therefore we find him on the Mount giving his most gracious Instructions to his Disciples; expounding the Law in several particular Doctrines wrested by the Teachers, and least the Leaven of the Pharisees (which is Hypocrisy) should taint them, He assures them expressly in the Words before us, that, "Except their Righteousness should exceed the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no Case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

FROM

From this short Account of the Words
I shall

First, ENQUIRE a little into the Nature
of this Righteousness which stands con-
demned in the Text,

Secondly, I SHALL shew that it was not
sufficient of itself for the Salvation of
Mankind ; and

Thirdly, THAT the Christian Religion was
intended to advance us to that Happi-
ness which the other was not capa-
ble of,

THE Law, which in the Beginning was
enacted by God to regulate and perfect the
Actions of Men, consisted of *Letter* and
Spirit : One of which curb'd the inordi-
nate Motions of the external Members of
the Body ; the other only respected the Ope-
rations of the Soul. The Carnal Command-
ment took Notice of the licentious Freedom
of the Tongue, whilst Violence and Out-
rage were both easily restrained by working
in the Transgressor an Apprehension of Pu-
nishment. So that Oppression and Cruelty
were check'd by one Part, and the Evil
Motions

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Motions and Tendencies of the Heart were
forbid by the other.

THE greatest Part of the Levitical Priest-
hood, notwithstanding they seem'd so accu-
rate both in the Knowledge and Practice of
This, that they frequently, in the Obser-
vance of it, ran into Superstition, yet they
were generally involved in such a besotted
Dulness of their own contracting, as pre-
vented their penetrating into it's Life and
Spirit, and only suffered them to be trifling
and superficial.

FROM their Divinity it is easy to collect
that the most deliberately wicked Thoughts
were attended with no Manner of Guilt;
and if Malice in the Heart appear'd not in
Action, no one need apprehend any Punish-
ment entail'd on it. Tenets of this kind
open'd a Way for Doctrines of the most im-
moral Nature; prevailed with them to be-
lieve that if they kept themselves free from
shedding of Blood, they might hate their
Brother without a Crime; at least be guilty
but of a trifling and venial one, such as
God would overlook and easily pardon. The
publick Acts of Theft and Robbery, 'tis
true, were what they utterly detested; but
then (with the Levite recorded in the Parable)
they could hastily pass by their wounded
Neighbour

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Neighbour, without apprehending the least Obligation incumbent on them, either to relieve him in his Distress, or be instrumental in his Recovery.

Thus they erred (as might be illustrated by many other Instances) in the Interpretation of the Law, which respects our Thoughts as well as our Actions; and not only restrains our Hands from *doing* Violence, but our Tongues and our Hearts from *threatning* and *inventing* it. These were look'd upon as trifling Précepts, the Breach of which signified nothing, and that it was absurd in the Nature of the Thing to conceive that an idle Word, or a malicious Design should ever deserve infinite Torment.

'Twas this which occasioned the threatening Sentence of our Blessed Lord, immediately before the Text; (*viz.*) that whoever should break one of these *least* Commands, and teach Men so, should be call'd the least in the Kingdom of Heaven; and continues, in the following Part of the Chapter, to confute their false Doctrine in several other Particulars.

Thus the Jesuit, by expunging the Guilt of many notorious Crimes, puts such favourable Glosses and Constructions upon them,

as

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as either tend to give them the Appearance of Virtues, or to make them only inconsiderable Offences. The Hating our Maker (how terrible soever the Thought may be) is accounted by these Casuists to be no mortal Sin, provided it proceeds not from Deliberation: A perplexing Distrust of the Almighty's Providence is thought to be only a venial Crime, and to present our Bodies in the Eucharist itself, without any Disposition suitable to our Duty, is pardoned by the same Rule, as Acts of Infidelity are in the same Church. Prayers indeed are not made standing in the Markets or Corners of the Streets, but yet their Religious Exercises may all be gone through, without the least Attention; without any Act of Faith, Love, or Fear, or any Apprehension of impending Punishment. So that as praying *openly* was condemned by our Saviour as flagrant Hypocrisy, so praying *without Devotion* is equally abominable in the Sight of God.—This I only observ'd to shew how much the Jesuit resembles the Pharisee, and that the *Divinity* of the One is perfectly illustrated by the *Morals* of the Other.

THIS then may be sufficient to discover the Quality of that pretended Righteousness, which stands condemned in the Words before us.

AND

AND that it was not of itself enough for the Salvation of Men, was the

Second THING I proposed to consider.

THE false Construction which the Pharisees had put upon the Law of *Moses* had not only an ill Effect upon the attentive People, who were foolishly enamoured with the fancied Learning of the Elders, but it served likewise to lead *Themselves* into Error, in Points which regarded their future Happiness. No sooner had they been guilty of a Mis-interpretation, by too strictly confining it's Meaning and Design, but they concluded that they were capable of keeping it in every Particular, exclusive of any Divine, supernatural Assistance. "God (say they) we thank thee that we are not as others are; Extortioners, Unjust, Adulterers, or even as this Publican: We fast twice in the Week and give Tithes of all that we possess." All which Fondness of their own Self-Sufficiency arose from the false Glosses and unnatural Comments which they had put upon that Law, which required a more strict and perfect Obedience.

HAD their Constructions been true, the In-

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ferences which they made had doubtless been justifiable. Had that Dispensation, for Instance, exacted no more at our Hands than a bare Abstinence from Murder, Theft, and Perjury, (which in express Terms it is known to forbid) then probably our own Strength might have been sufficient to have conducted us safely through the perfect Discharge of it.

BUT when on the other Hand, Murder is couch'd under a revengeful Thought; Theft carried on in the Disguise of Usury, and with-holding from the Poor is *stealing from the Lord*, the most perfect Scribe must blush at his Obedience, and think it not unerring enough for his eternal Salvation.

NEITHER is this all in which it was deficient; it was faulty in a very material Point with regard to it's Effects, as it did not extend to Things desireable, nor answer the End of true Righteousness. The Justice of God could not be satisfied by it; it depended chiefly on a mere speculative Knowledge of the Doctrines of Religion; on a strict and punctual Observance of Trifles, whilst Concerns of Moment were laid aside and neglected.

HAD

HAD the Command prescribed by God extended only to Actions in themselves morally honest, without respecting a Man's Intentions in the Performance of them, then indeed They might have insisted upon the Eminence of their Integrity; have run down the suppliant *Publican*, as less holy than themselves, and have expected a much larger Share of Happiness.—But when the Precept is of a more comprehensive Nature, and takes in the Motions of the *Mind* as well as the Actions of the *Body*, an imperfect Observance will be but of little Service. It will never satisfy the *Preceptive* Justice of God in commanding, nor expiate for Sin once committed to his *Vindictive* Justice in punishing.

LET us but look back upon the best Periods of the Jewish Oeconomy, when their Sanctity was at the highest Degree of it's Perfection, and we shall find that even then many unwarrantable Practices were espous'd such as natural and uncorrupted Reason utterly detests. Divorce and Polygamy were not only connived at but openly approved of, and several Degrees of Uncharitableness and Revenge (instead of being suppressed) seem'd to have been publickly encouraged by Licence. 'Twas high Time there-

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fore that the Design of Christianity should be put in Execution; that God should reveal his Will for the Good of Mankind, and ratify a Religion which should correct the Doctrines of the Pharisees, and advance us to That Happiness which the other was not capable of.

THE Religion of the Jews, considered altogether, was so far from having the Face of a perfect and compleat Institution, that it look'd rather like a Toleration, or an Indulgence only granted by God, than his absolute Law and Command. It bore (tis true) that Stamp of his Authority, but at the same Time it was not the best Religion in itself, only the best they were then capable of bearing. For no sooner (after their Return from the Captivity) were the Impressions of their Servitude worn out, but their Proneness to Idolatry hung so heavy upon them, and their former slavish Dispositions were so visible, that upon all Occasions, for a considerable Time after, they relapsed into their Superstitious, Egyptian Ceremonies.

BUT when the Redeemer of Mankind made his Appearance amongst the Sons of Men, he thought it necessary to recover the World from those beggarly Elements to

to which it was devoted, and to give Creatures, design'd for Eternity, proper Notions of an Almighty Being; to acquaint them with the Spiritual Nature of Worship and Adoration; to lay open the Extent of his Universal Empire over Jew and Gentile, and by his *Example* as well as *Doctrine*, to set before them the most perfect Rule for forming their Manners,

THE Doctrine under the Law of loving our Neighbours, Friends, and Acquaintance, He knew to be too weak a Cement to hold human Societies together; and therefore He thought proper to extend the Duty to our very Enemies. Every the least Impediment He carefully removed, and left such Engagements to Love and Unity, that no one can now be a Transgressor, without using Severity and Violence to himself. His frequent Exhortations to Men of all Degrees still tended to the Promotion of it, to establish a sacred and inviolable Agreement, as the strongest Tye to all social Virtues. Nay the Precepts of his Religion are so exactly contrived even for the *Political* Happiness of Man, that the best concerted Schemes of the most prudent human Law-givers fall infinitely below them.

IN short; Our *Civil* Interest (how uncommon soever the Assertion may seem to some)

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some) is naturally supported by Virtue and Religion. The Turbulent Humours and different Passions, with which Mens Minds are frequently distracted, are too violent to be controuled by the mere Strength of human Laws: 'Tis the Obligation of Conscience and the Duties of Religion which tend to assuage the Overflowings of Ungodliness; restrain Men from running into a common Hostility, and preserves the weak from falling a Sacrifice to the Mighty. This was the Design of the Christian Dispensation, to enjoin the Observance of all such Virtues as were necessary for the Preservation of human Society; to bind them upon the Conscience with stronger Obligations, than ever the Gentiles learned of their Philosophers, or the Jews of their great Lawgiver *Moses*,

AN Inference or two from what has been said may serve as a Conclusion to the present Subject.

WAS the Jewish Religion then lame and imperfect, and it's Doctrines corrupted thro' the sordid Temper of it's Teachers, let it be our chief Care to avoid That Hypocrisy which was so flagrant in the *Pharisee*, and to preserve the Precepts of Christianity pure and unblemish'd.

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THAT we must through much Tribulation enter into Heaven, was told us by our Lord to prepare us for the Attacks which Persecution might make upon us. The Reward of our Constancy (if duly considered) is an ample Provision against the Calamities of Life, let the Storm beat ever so violent; and the Sacredness of the Person stamps a Sanction upon the Promise, and keeps the upright Man always steadfast in his Duty. No fashionable Doctrine can subvert his Integrity, nor Novel Conceits lead him aside. *Cæsar's* Superscription may put him in Mind to be subject to Principalities, but no Image of *Cæsar* can appear so beautiful, as to tempt him to deface *that* of God for the Sake of it. If Religion flourishes, He shouts Hosannah to it's Author; but if it be reviled and laugh'd at, and by such Usage Christ buffeted, spit upon, and crucified afresh, no Apprehension leads him into Distrust, He is neither frightened by Threatning, nor seduced by Promise, but (amidst the worst Circumstances) he corrects the Timorousness of *St. Peter* by declaring openly that he *knows the Man*.—Though he be brought before Magistrates for the Sake of his Religion, and Drunkards make Songs upon him, yet “*his Heart standeth fast and believeth in the Lord;*” and,
with

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with *David*, he is not deterred from *meditating on His Statutes*.

'Tis not the uppermost Seats in the Synagogue, Greetings in the Market, or to be called *Rabbi* of Men which can allure him from his Duty; he considers that there is one *Master* over all in Heaven; and that if we are not as exemplary in our Lives, as we are advanced in our Stations, we shall have the Pharisee's Sentence passed upon us, *Woe be to You Hypocrites; and receive the greater Damnation*. He does not, with the Natural Hypocrite, take *Nature* for *Grace*; nor with the Moral One, set up *Reason* for *Religion*. To esteem *Education* for *Conscience* is running into Civil Hypocrisy, and to think *Delusion* *Devotion* is a superstitious Principle. The Want of Knowledge is thought a Virtue by none but the *Ignorant*, and 'tis only the *Heretical* who take *Error* for *Truth*. To prefer *Mammon* to his *God*, he considers, is *carnal and earthly*, and to make *Policy* *Piety*, is the Hypocrisy of Statesmen.

BUT alas! there is one still behind more infamous in his Character than all the rest. The Person I mean who professes Religion without Godliness, only to make a Cloak for his Deceit. Prophaneness by this Means grows under

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under a Disguise; He declares Himself a Christian only to patronize a brutish Practice; professes that he knows God, but in Works denies him.

Thus *Absalom* counterfeited his Humility and his Piety too, only the more plausibly to conceal his Treason; and notwithstanding he had a Vow to perform, yet in defiance of this mighty Shew of Devotion, with the same Conscience He afterwards lay in *Jerusalem* with the Concubines of his Father. Honour me (says *Saul*) before the Elders of my People, and before *Israel*, and turn again with me that I may worship; The Intent of which terminated in his own Ends, only that he might get the Love of the People. So just is the Observation of *Aristotle* in his third Book of Politicks, where he makes Religion so useful, that the very Shew of it in a Prince is necessary to procure a Regard for the People. The Reason of which doubtless was This, that Subjects could have no Apprehension of Hurt from any Governour who manifested a Regard for God, and that Rebellion against Him (who had God for his Friend) must be (according to the Prophet) as the Sin of Witchcraft.

BUT Secondly: Is the Christian Religion an Affair of so great Concern and Moment
H h that

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that without a punctual Observance of it none shall see the Lord, let it never enter into our Thoughts to betray it, as *Judas* did the Author of it, in View of any earthly Interest whatever. *Who will shew us any Good?* is the continual Outcry of the Worldly-minded Man; and from whence any trifling Profit may come, he thinks it good for him to be there, and accordingly he builds an Altar and offers his Praise. In what Place soever my Lord the King shall be, whether in Death or in Life, even there also will thy Servant be, was the fawning Speech of *Ittai* the Gittite unto *David*. And thus the Sensual Man thinks with Regard to the World. If Gain be Godliness there he will offer his Vows, and his Service be most ready, but should Godliness interrupt the Current of his Profit, He sets it aside as *Felix* did the Apostle; *Go thy Way for this Time, when I have a convenient Season I will call for Thee.*

BUT we, who profess Christianity, I hope, have not so learned *Christ*. Let our Eyes be steadily fixed upon more durable Pleasure, and our Love for Religion firm and unshaken; then we shall not take our Leave of it as *Orpah* did of her Mother in Law, when her Hope was at an End; but say to it

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it as *Ruth* did to *Naomi*: "Intreat me not
"to leave thee, or to return from following
"after Thee: For whither thou goest I will
"go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge.
"Thy People shall be my People, and thy
"God my God. Where Thou diest I will
"die, and there will I be buried. The
"Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought
"but Death part Thee from me."

With this Resolution we shall lie down
in Peace; Distress may possibly attend a
punctual Discharge of our Christian Duties;
we may be persecuted and forsaken for not
complying with this World; but then Tri-
bulation will be the Gate, through which
we shall enter into the Glory of the next.

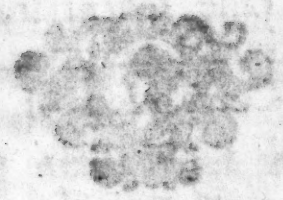


But we will not be discouraged; I hope
that our Eyes be
firmly fixed upon the durable Pleasure
and our Love for Religion firm and un-
shaken; then we shall not take our leave
of it as Orpah did of her Mother in Law,
when her Hope was at an End; but say to

...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father

With this resolution we shall be down
in Peace: But we shall be down
in Peace: But we shall be down
in Peace: But we shall be down
in Peace: But we shall be down
in Peace: But we shall be down
in Peace: But we shall be down
in Peace: But we shall be down

PHIL OSOFT
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father
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...and I will be to you as a Father
...and I will be to you as a Father



The Reasonableness of crediting the Doctrines of the Gospel.

S E R M O N XIII.

Colos. ii. 8.

Beware lest any Man spoil you thro' Philosophy and vain Deceit; after the Manner of Men, after the Rudiments of the World, and not after Christ.

PHILOSOPHY (we are told by a Father of the third Century) was given as a proper Foundation upon which the Greeks were to raise Christianity. That so strict a Caution should be given against it as tending to the Corruption of the Christian Converts, at first Sight may appear inconsistent with St. Paul's great Character, who was educated in no mean School of human Learning, was promoted from the Feet of Gamaliel to the venerable Dignity of a Jewish Doctor, and a Member of the Sanhedrim.

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The great Preference He had to the other Apostles took its Rise from this Happiness of Education; and as He had made himself Master of the *Hebrew* Traditions, and perfectly acquainted with the Jewish Constitutions, there is no Room to suspect that He would condemn, or even censure Reason or Philosophy, had They not been basely corrupted by Deceit and Tradition.

He was satisfy'd that Philosophy in Itself would never in any Degree injure Christianity, but that It would rather direct our Faculties into such Pursuits, as would tend to promote the true Knowledge of God; that It would prepare us for the Completion of the Doctrines of the Gospel, and instead of depressing, would be instrumental in advancing the Credit of the Christian Religion.

Thus array'd in human Literature, and acquainted with the difficult Points of Science, our Apostles was enabled to discover the Adept from the Pretender to Learning, and from this extensive Capacity no doubt proceeded the Caveat in my Text. The *Gnosticks* were a Sect, who had borrowed some frothy Wisdom from the Heathenish Philosophy of *Pythagoras*, and from some Parts of *Judaism*, neither of which was consistent

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sistent with Christian Divinity. Under this Disguise They strove to impose their destructive Principles on the Christian Converts in order to baffle them in their Belief by *vain Deceit, after the Tradition of Men, after the Rudiments of the World and not after Christ.*

THIS was happily discovered by St. Paul, and, in Consequence of it, we find the Wisdom of the Greeks easily superseded by the more absolute Doctrine of our Blessed Lord. A Doctrine in Itself so exact and perfect, that a more compleat Model cannot be devised either of Moral or Divine Knowledge. Estimated by this Comparison the best Precepts respecting the Jewish Ceremonies were *vain* and deceitful; the most profound Searchers into Nature's Law laboured under the same Defect, and the Dogmas of the Sages were lighter than Vanity itself when put in the Scale against the Rules of the Gospel.

THE Apostle's Design seems to be to oppose the Doctrines of Christianity to the Jewish and Gentile Wisdom; in Pursuance of which it may not be improper if I enquire in the

First

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First PLACE, Whether the Philosophy here taken Notice of, did not justly fall under St. Paul's Censure?

Secondly, WHETHER there be not sufficient Reason to justify the Assent which we give to the Doctrines of the Gospel?

A FEW Words may be added *Lastly*, as a Diffusive from Scepticism and Infidelity.

FIRST then I am to enquire whether the Philosophy here taken Notice of, did not justly fall under St. Paul's Censure?

THE ultimate End of all human Actions strictly speaking, must be allowed to be our greatest Good. Evil, from a Principle of Self-Preservation, is what Nature tells us we ought to avoid: So that when we engage Ourselves in the Pursuit of any Thing injurious, We are only chasing Misery in the Disguise of Happiness through the malignant Suggestions of a corrupted Appetite, or the poysonous Persuasions of an erroneous Judgment.

To know God, and by that Knowledge to enjoy him, the Apostle intimates to be the

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chief Good of Mankind, and those Means must be most approved of, which tend most to the Accomplishment of such an End. The Doctrine here condemned gave so little Direction to this Point, that the Espousers of it (without imposing very much upon their Reason) could never hope to arrive at any other Perfection than That of Misery. Error and Folly were both blended in the very Nature of it, and nothing less than a Miracle could prevent their Principles from being attended with *Deceit*. The Opinions of the Sages themselves relating to Felicity pointed out their Incapacity of chalking out any Path that would lead to it: And how *They* should ever be able to recover the Divine Favour, who were utterly ignorant how it was first lost, is something not to be reconciled with any Degree of Probability.

THE Light of Nature, or even the Direction of moral Reason, were not strong enough to reflect to their Understanding the first Cause of human Misery, and it never came within the Compass of their boasted Knowledge whether Man ever had it in his Power to perform a pure and unblemished Obedience. They made (it must be confessed) some low and pitiful Conjectures about it; They fancied that Man came

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pure from the Hands of Purity itself; but how He became subject to so much Infir-
mity and Disorder, was a Doubt and Diffi-
culty which the Strength of their Philosophy
could not clear up to them.

BUT the Origin of corrupted Nature was
not the only Obstacle: The Immortality of
the Soul was a Principle attended with more
Difficulty, which staggered the Resolution
of Some, and surmounted the Belief of
Others. Many unwarrantable Notions, made
plausible and familiar by Custom, obstructed
the Influence, which the Pleas of Nature
and Right Reason ought to have had in the
Behalf of it: Scruples continually surrounded
their Faith; *Clouds and Darkness were round
about them*, and Prejudice detained them
from the Knowledge of Truth.

AN incorporeal Substance startled the Epi-
cureans into a flat Denial of it; and the
Disciples of *Plato*, by the very same thing,
were hurried into the ridiculous Opinion of
lodging a rational Soul in the Body of a
Brute. Some indeed amongst them allowed
it's Existence after the Separation of the vital
Union, but then they made it in itself a Prin-
ciple naturally mortal. Their Tenets how-
ever were so uncertain, and the Determina-
tions of the Espousers thereof so weak and
irresolute,

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irresolute, that we can discover none of them who were able to fix the Period of it's Expiration.

It would be almost endless to trace their Errors in Point of Morality; to make a particular Scrutiny into their intollerable Pride, and unnatural Enmity; their debauched Practice and Principles which encouraged even Self-Murder: All which however the Apostle was vigilant in guarding his Converts against, and to oppose the united Strength of Stoick and Epicurean.

This Doctrine therefore might reasonably be censured as vain Deceit, as a meer pretence to Reason and Philosophy, seeing their boasted Knowledge tended not to Edification, being something which they borrowed from the Adoration of Angels, and a Doctrine indulging Creatures to be Intercessors with God. Had we Time to trace it through the several Periods of the Heathen World, a Discovery would soon be made of it's Tendency to Heresy, and that, in some particular Cases, Infidelity Itself arose from It.

REASON, properly so called, and the true Knowledge of Nature, (which is what I mean by true Philosophy) direct us to the Acknowledgment of the Supreme Being,

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who framed the World by Wisdom and Power: But such are the low Notions some entertain of *Wisdom*, that no Age has yet produced one of *David's Fools*, but who has been a marvellous Pretender to Philosophy and Reason; And it will be no Discovery made to any Person acquainted with the Writings of *Tertullian*, to aver that many, even of the Fathers Themselves, (distinguished for their Learning) were corrupted by the false Philosophy of the *Platonists*.

SUFFICIENT Reason therefore I think appears why *St. Paul* should thus guard his Christian Converts against this vain Deceit, the Traditions of Men, and the Rudiments of the World, seeing they were attacked with Doctrines *not after Christ*, and were in Danger of falling off from that saving Faith, delivered to the World in the Books of Scripture.

THIS brings me to enquire in the

Second PLACE, Whether there be not sufficient Reason to justify the Assent which we give to the Doctrines of the Gospel?

WE have not, I think, any Reason to believe that the Books of the Old Testament ever underwent any material Corruption from
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the Silence of our Saviour relating to that Particular. The many known Crimes and Abuses, which the different Sects of the Jews were guilty of, he openly and severely corrected. It is improbable therefore that He should connive at the Corruption of those sacred Oracles, which were designed as the principal Instruments in the Establishment of his Holy Religion. A Neglect of this Kind would have furnished the Infidel with a better Argument against his Divinity than any hitherto produced to lessen it; and we may safely say that He had been very unfaithful in the House of God as well as in that Embassy he undertook upon Earth, had he suffered such Fraud to have escaped undetected.

THERE is likewise as little Probability that these Holy Writings should have been in any material Circumstance corrupted before our Saviour's Time, and morally impossible that they should have been since, or even for many Centuries antecedent to his Nativity.

MANY Copies of the Law and the Prophets were dispersed amongst the Jews, and publickly read every Sabbath in the Synagogue. Had any material Alteration been made in Either, the Error could not have escaped Observation, but must necessarily have

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have been detected by the Others. To which, if we add the inveterate Enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans, there will appear no Possibility of Their conspiring in such a Fraud, nor Hopes of Success had the Attempt been made. The literal Slips in the Hebrew Originals are so very trifling and insignificant, that no one but a cavilling Jew will think them worth Correction or Notice. Throughout the whole Catalogue of various Lectures selected by those Critics, there appears not one which touches upon any Article of Faith.

SOME little Mistakes the Scriptures must have been subject to in such a Tract of Time, and in so many Versions; One in particular is observed by some critical Writers, in the Translation of them into our own Language. When the Apostles (in the sixth Chapter of the Acts) were about to ordain some of the Believers, some of our Books have it —choose Ye out seven Men, whom Ye may appoint over this Business." The Mistake, if not corrected by the Original (which signifies *We* instead of *Ye*) would be of some Disservice to Religion; would confirm an elective Power in the People; destroy the Episcopal Jurisdiction, and open a Gap for Dissenters as wide as the most extensive Act of Tolleration.

THIS

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THIS Digression is only to shew that every Slip in the Holy Writings cannot be termed a *Corruption*, nor any Error of this Nature, whether designed or casual, ever remain undetected amidst such numberless Copies.

SHOULD any Objection be raised against all Matters of Fact related in Scripture, or that there can be no Obligation to credit Things done at such a Distance from us, the Objector may remember that This may prove too much, and that by thus undermining Gospel Truths, Prophane History will receive altogether as fatal a Wound: It being an Argument as often apply'd by the Atheist against *All* Religion, as it is by the Deist to subvert Christianity. Human Testimony, I think, is universally agreed to be a sufficient Foundation for human Assent, provided there appears no positive Ground for Suspicion. In which particular Point we may safely assert that the sacred Scriptures are as clear from encouraging any such Apprehension as any History at this Time extant.

BUT further: Had the Apostles been Men of known Subtilty, abounding with Dissimulation or acquainted with Artifice; Had

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Had they (like *Mahomet*) adapted their Doctrines to the Genius of the People, and indulged them in extreme Lasciviousness; or pretended (like the Fanaticks) to a divine Inspiration, which carried with it manifest Falshood and Contradiction; had any Thing, I say, of this Nature at any Time shewed itself in the Writings of the Gospel, some Reason there had been then for Suspicion, and Objections to it had not been culpable. Had this been the Design of propagating a Falshood and imposing a Cheat on the World, the Scheme seems very ill laid in choosing Persons to carry it on, who were unacquainted with Men, and not versed in Worldly Business: A few of the most illiterate Part of Mankind, incapable of dealing with a Citizen of *Jerusalem*. An Affair of such Consequence would have required more discerning Heads than These had; would have reflected greatly on our Saviour's Choice, and have been a sufficient Argument of the Stupidity of the Apostles (had it been an Imposture) in hoping for Success,

BUT such was the Divine Nature of the Gospel that it rose superior to *All* Opposition, and Persecution itself proved no mean Instrument of its Progress and Advancement. The Obstinacy of the *Jew* bent under it's Weight, and the Wisdom of the
Greek

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Greek appeared upon Comparison only a splendid Species of Folly. No artful or beguiling Means were made use of; (which Impostors would have artfully apply'd in their Cause) no insinuating or fawning Speeches to captivate a silly, unthinking People, nor any Flattery to recommend themselves to the *Vain*, but the Apostles sharply reprov'd the Elders of the Sanhedrim for the Murder of their crucify'd Lord and Master.

THESE can never be thought any Marks of Deceit or Delusion; The Nature of them directly opposes the common Passions of Mankind, and lays a heavy Restraint upon our longing Desires; We find no Pleasures for the Gratification of the Voluptuous, nor Grandeur to allure the Haughty. The Miser is check'd in his favourite Passion, and the Hands of Revenge bound up in Forgiveness. No temporal Prince appears to take off the Yoke of Roman Insolence, but the great Expectation of the Jew is balked and disappointed by the Appearance of a meek and humble Power; and as for the Gentiles, this Doctrine charges Them with nothing less than direct Idolatry.

SUCH are the surprizing Effects it produced contrary to all human Methods, that it

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plainly shewed there was something in it more than Man, and made it very evident that nothing but the same creative Power, which at first commanded Beauty to flow from Confusion, caused such wonderful Success to attend the Apostles Doctrine. Had they acted by their own natural Powers, abstracted from the Divine Impulse of Heaven, They had never made full Proof of their Ministry, and had it been only a *Politick* Religion which they had embarked in the Cause of, They shewed their Incapacity for such an Employment, by laying the Stress of their Religion upon the particular Circumstance of the Resurrection, a Fact newly done, and (if false) might, and beyond all Dispute would have been joyfully confuted.

BUT still the Word of God increased and multiplied; three Thousand Converts were the Produce of one single Discourse of St. Peter, and all Jerusalem was filled with this Doctrine. The Sound of it went out into all Lands, it's Words reached the Ends of the Earth, and a Cloud of Testimonies appeared to confirm it. What Need have we therefore (to use the ill-apply'd Question of the High-Priest) of any further Witnesses for the Ratification of it's Truth and Divinity? And this, I hope, will be sufficient for what was proposed under the Second Branch of this

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this Discourse. A Word or Two may be added by Way of Conclusion, as a Dissuasive from Scepticism and Infidelity.

THE Disesteem of the Scriptures has been justly observed to occasion a Decay of Religion amongst Us. The Authority of these holy Writings once called in question, is so prevalent a Temptation that Multitudes give an implicate Faith to it, and admire the Doctrine upon no other Account but as prompted to it by an interested Desire and an inordinate Will. Hurried by a false and prejudiced Reason, They are delighted with undermining those severe Truths which affect them with Horror, 'till at length they persuade themselves that their Fears are only built upon Fancy and Dream, and that there is no Foundation for such ridiculous Apprehensions. A Passage from hence is laid open to all Manner of Licentiousness. The Restraint is thrown aside which before galled the Mind, and Immorality is now thought never criminal, but when it affects the Body with Disorder. Contempt of every Thing sacred becomes a necessary Principle, the Precepts of the Gospel are decry'd as idle, amusing Tales, and the Predictions of the Prophets as Flights of Enthusiasm. Poison, in this Disguise, spreads universally; and the most ignorant Writer in the Defence of In-

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fideliſty meets with Applauſe, whoſe Pen would have met with Contempt and Ridicule, had he preſumed to have employed it in the Defence of Chriſtianity.

BUT let it be obſerved that an abſolute Freedom from the Goſpel Precepts will never advance a Man's Happineſs even in this Life. His Condition will be attended with Vexation and Trouble till he has wrested the Sword from the Hand of the Civil Magiſtrate; ſtripped him of all Authority, as he has dealt with his God, and made the Laws of Both uſeleſs and ineffectual. Even this difficult Taſk, when accompliſhed, will not answer the propoſed End. Every Man will be at Liberty to do as he ſhall think proper without Reftraint; the Weak will fall a Sacrifice to the Anger of the Mighty, and like Wolves We ſhall prey upon one Another, till the whole World is become a Field of Blood.

SOME Actions, even the Infidel muſt acknowledge, ought not to be tolerated, and ſome Paſſions too, if not reſtrained, will be found incompatible with the Welfare of human Society. In particular Caſes therefore ſome Regimen muſt be thought neceſſary, and thoſe very Penalties, requiſite to correct Enormities of this Kind, muſt be at leaſt agreeable

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agreeable to those religious Precepts which He had laboured to extinguish in order to advance his Felicity. Is not the Opposition therefore to Religion unreasonable and strictly ridiculous? Has not the Infidel been seeking *Grapes from Thorns and Figs from Thistles?* Is not He forced to revert to the very Point which he fled from, in order to obtain even earthly Felicity? He at last discovers that the Subversion of the Divine Laws gives a fatal Shock to all human Safety, and that the Ways of Religion are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Directions point to the Paths of Peace.

He, who makes bodily Pleasures the sole Happiness of human Life, has generally the least Relish of that Delight with which he is captivated. Indulgence and Excess serve only to depress the Spirits of Nature, to blunt the Edge of our Senses and to render them incapable of any quick Perception. Our Appetites must be moderated by the Standard of Religion, and all Excess avoided as an Enemy to Nature, if we would enjoy the real Benefit of Worldly Pleasures, and have the Satisfaction of properly gratifying our Senses.

WERE we to consider Ourselves only as Beings abstracted from all Relation to Immortality,

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mortality, whose Prospect was confined to the narrow Limits of this present World, Religious Principles should, of all others, be industriously cultivated by us. The Preservation of our bodily Health should be our principal Care; a proper Application of what this visible World yielded, to continue us in Being, would be a Mark of our Discretion, and should be our constant Study, and whatever tended to shorten our Days should be declined and avoided as a Pestilence raging at Noon Day. But the Loss of religious Principles would produce very bad Effects, would confute the Reasoning of the Atheist to explode them as Burdens, and point out the Necessity of their Restraints for the publick Weal and Good of Mankind. In short; upon an Establishment without Religion, it is plain, Men would think those Methods most eligible, which tended most to the speedy Amendment of their Fortunes; the Names of Things would suffer an entire Change; Evil would be called Good, and Vice Virtue; the Observation of *Justice*, and the Practice of *Integrity* would be each deemed a dull and slow Manner of Thriving, and the more effectual Measures of Theft and Robbery would take Place, and be applauded as the most elevated and refined Wisdom. But the Necessity of curbing such malignant Irregularities appears, I hope, too evident

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to need any further Confirmation : And it would be easy to shew that Religion has not only a direct Tendency to promote our Good, but a real Foundation in human Nature.

In a Word : If the Pagan Philosophy was lame and deficient, founded upon Mistake and full of Deceit : If the Precepts enjoin'd by the Christian Scheme tended to promote the Advantage of Mankind, without any Design of imposing Falshood or encouraging Error ; if Scepticism and Infidelity are the Parents of Uneasiness, and the Gospel Precepts be Guides to the Fruition of this Life and the Felicity of the next, let us not with the *Sceptick* involve ourselves in Doubt, nor with the *Unbeliever* deny our Assent for Want of Demonstration ; but let us remember the Rebuke given by our Saviour to St. *Thomas*, " Blessed are They who " have not seen, and yet have believed."

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